MARCH—25¢

Weird Tales

The Unique Magazine

MARCH, 1933

WEIRD TALES

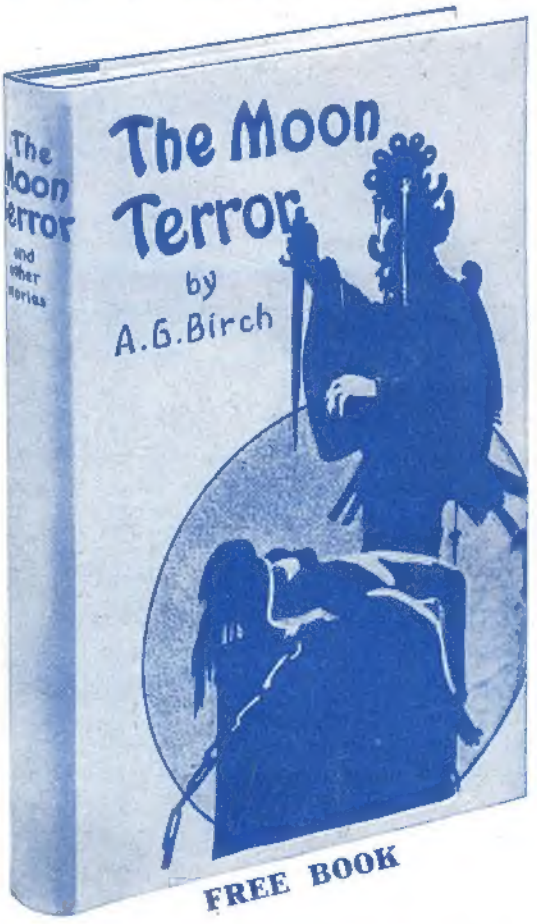
Vol. 21, No. 3—25c

a powerful
werewolf
story
BY SEABURY QUINN

Harold Ward - Arlton Eadie - Otis Adelbert Kline
Paul Ernst - Clark Ashton Smith - Robert E. Howard

A Phantom from the Ether

Threatens the Lives of all Mankind



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The Thing in the Fog

By SEABURY QUINN

"It shook its teeth loose from my coat-sleeve and clawed at my face and throat with its fore-paws."

A goose-flesh novelette, complete in this issue, about a spectacular exploit of the little French scientist and occultist, Jules de Grandin

"TIENS, on such a night as this the Devil must congratulate himself!" Jules de Grandin forced his chin still deeper in the upturned collar of his trench-coat, and bent his head against the whorls of chilling mist which eddied upward from the bay in token that autumn was dead and winter come at last.

"Congratulate himself?" I asked in amusement as I felt before me for the curbstone with the ferrule of my stick. "Why?"

"Why? *Pardieu,* because he sits at ease beside the cozy fires of hell, and does not have to feel his way through this eternally-to-be-execrated fog! If we had but the sense——

"*Pardon, Monsieur,* one of us is very clumsy, and I do not think that it is I!"

he broke off sharply as a big young man, evidently carrying a heavier cargo of ardent spirits than he could safely manage, lurched against him in the smothering mist, then caromed off at an unsteady angle to lose himself once more in the enshrouding fog.

"Dolt!" the little Frenchman muttered peevishly. "If he can not carry liquor he should abstain from it. Me, I have no patience with these—*grand Dieu,* what is that?"

Somewhere behind us, hidden in the curtains of the thick, gray vapor, there came a muffled exclamation, half of fright, half of anger, the sound of something fighting threshingly with something else, and a growling, snarling noise, as though a savage dog had leapt upon its prey, and, having fleshed its teeth, was worrying it; then: "Help!" The cry was muffled, strangled, but laden with a weight of helpless terror.

"Hold fast, my friend, we come!" de Grandin cried, and, guided by the sounds of struggle, breasted through the fog as if it had been water, brandishing his silver-headed sword-stick before him as a guide and a defense.

A score of quick steps brought us to the conflict. Dim and indistinct as shadows on a moonless night, two forms were struggling on the sidewalk, a large one lying underneath, while over it, snarling savagely, was a thing I took for a police dog which snapped and champed and worried at the other's throat.

"Help!" called the man again, straining futilely to hold the snarling beast away and turning on his side the better to protect his menaced face and neck.

"*Cordieu,* a war-dog!" exclaimed the Frenchman. "Stand aside, Friend Trowbridge, he is savage, this one; mad, perhaps, as well." With a quick, whipping motion he ripped the chilled-steel blade from the barrel of his stick and, point advanced, circled round the struggling man and beast, approaching with a cautious, cat-like step as he sought an opportunity to drive home the sword.

By some uncanny sense the snarling brute divined his purpose, raised its muzzle from its victim's throat and backed away a step or two, regarding de Grandin with a stare of utter hatred. For a moment I caught the smoldering glare of a pair of fire-red eyes, burning through the fog-folds as incandescent charcoal might burn through a cloth, and:

"A dog? *Non, parateu,* it is——" began the little Frenchman, then checked himself abruptly as he lunged out swiftly with his blade, straight for the glaring, fiery eyes which glowered at him through the mist.

The great beast backed away with no apparent haste, yet quickly enough to avoid the needle-point of Jules de Grandin's blade, and for an instant I beheld a row of gleaming teeth bared savagely beneath the red eyes' glare; then, with a snarling growl which held more defiance than surrender in its throaty rumble, the brute turned lithely, dodged and made off through the fog, disappearing from sight before the clicking of its nails against the pavement had been lost to hearing.

"Look to him, Friend Trowbridge," de Grandin ordered, casting a final glance about us in the mist before he put his sword back in its sheath. "Does he survive, or is he killed to death?"

"He's alive, all right," I answered as I sank to my knees beside the supine man, "but he's been considerably chewed up. Bleeding badly. We'd best get him to the office and patch him up before——"

"Wha— what was it?" our mangled patient asked abruptly, rising on his elbow

and staring wildly round him. "Did you kill it—did it get away? D'ye think it had hydrophobia?"

"Easy on, son," I soothed, locking my hands beneath his arms and helping him to rise. "It bit you several times, but you'll be all right as soon as we can stop the bleeding. Here"—I snatched a handkerchief from the breast pocket of my dinner coat and pressed it into his hand—"hold this against the wound while we're walking. No use trying to get a taxi tonight, the driver'd never find his way about. I live only a little way from here and we'll make it nicely if you'll lean on me. So! That's it!"

THE young man leant heavily upon my shoulder and almost bore me down, for he weighed a good fourteen stone, as we made our way along the vapor-shrouded street.

"I say, I'm sorry I bumped into you, sir," the youngster apologized as de Grandin took his other arm and eased me somewhat of my burden. "Fact is, I'd taken a trifle too much and was walkin' on a side hill when I passed you." He pressed the already-reddened handkerchief closer to his lacerated neck as he continued with a chuckle: "Maybe it's a good thing I did, at that, for you were within hearing when I called because you'd stopped to cuss me out."

"You may have right, my friend," de Grandin answered with a laugh. "A little drunkenness is not to be deplored, and I doubt not you had reason for your drinking—not that one needs a reason, but——"

A sudden shrill, sharp cry for help cut through his words, followed by another call which stopped half uttered on a strangled, agonizing note; then, in a moment, the muffled echo of a shot, another, and, immediately afterward, the shrilling signal of a police whistle.

"*Tête bleu,* this night is full of action as a pepper-pot is full of spice!" exclaimed de Grandin, turning toward the summons of the whistle. "Can you manage him, Friend Trowbridge? If so I——"

Pounding of heavy boots on the sidewalk straight ahead told us that the officer approached, and a moment later his form, bulking gigantically in the fog, hove into view. "Did anny o' yez see——" he started, then raised his hand in half-formal salute to the vizor of his cap as he recognized de Grandin.

"I don't suppose ye saw a dar-rg come runnin' by this way, sor?" he asked. "I wuz walkin' up th' street a moment since, gettin' ready to report at th' box, when I heard a felly callin' for help, an' what should I see next but th' biggest, ugliest baste of a dar-rg ye iver clapped yer eyes upon, a-worryin' at th' pore lad's throat. I wus close to it as I'm standin' to you, sor, pretty near, an' I shot at it twict, but I'm damned if I didn't miss both times, slick as a whistle—an' me holdin' a pistol expert's medal from th' department, too!"

"U'm?" de Grandin murmured. "And the unfortunate man beset by this great beast your bullets failed to hit, what of him?"

"Glory be to God; I plumb forgot 'im!" the policeman confessed. "Ye see, sor, I wuz that overcome wid shame, as th' felly says, whin I realized I'd missed th' baste that I run afther it, hopin' I'd find it agin an' maybe put a slug into it this time, so——"

"Quite so, one understands," de Grandin interrupted, "but let us give attention to the man; the beast can wait until we find him, and—*mon Dieu!* It is as well you did not stay to give him the first aid, my friend, your efforts would have been without avail. His case demands the coroner's attention."

He did not understate the facts. Stretched on his back, hands clenched to fists, legs slightly spread, one doubled partly under him, a man lay on the sidewalk; across the white expanse of evening shirt his opened coat displayed there spread a ruddy stickiness, while his starched white-linen collar was already sopping with the blood which oozed from his torn and mangled throat. Both external and anterior jugulars had been ripped away by the savagery which had torn the integument of the neck to shreds, and so deeply had the ragged wound gone that a portion of the hyoid bone had been exposed. A spate of blood had driveled from the mouth, staining lips and chin, and the eyes, forced out between the lids, were globular and fixed and staring, though the film of death had hardly yet had time to set upon them.

"Howly Mither!" cried the officer in horror as he looked upon the body. "Sure, it were a hound from th' Divil's own kennels done this, sor!"

"I think that you have right," de Grandin nodded grimly. "Call the department, if you will be so good. I will stand by the body." He took a kerchief from his pocket and opened it, preparatory to veiling the poor, mangled face which stared appealingly up at the fog-bound night, but:

"My God, it's Suffrige!" the young man at my side exclaimed. "I left him just before I blundered into you, and—oh, what could have done it?"

"The same thing which almost did as much for you, *Monsieur,*" the Frenchman answered in a level, toneless voice. "You had a very narrow escape from being even as your friend, I do assure you."

"You mean that dog——" he stopped, incredulous, eyes fairly starting from his face as he stared in fascination at his friend's remains.

"The dog, yes, let us call it that," de Grandin answered.

"But—but——" the other stammered, then, with an incoherent exclamation which was half sigh, half groaning hiccup, slumped heavily against my shoulder and slid unconscious to the ground.

De Grandin shrugged in irritation. "Now we have two of them to watch," he complained. "Do you recover him as quickly as you can, my friend, while I——" he turned his back to me, dropped his handkerchief upon the dead man's face and bent to make a closer examination of the wounds in the throat.

I took the handkerchief from my overcoat pocket, ran it lightly over the trunk of a leafless tree which stood beside the curb and wrung the moisture from it on the unconscious man's face and forehead. Slowly he recovered, gasped feebly, then, with my assistance, got upon his feet, keeping his back resolutely turned to the grisly thing upon the sidewalk. "Can—you—help—me—to—your—office?" he asked slowly, breathing heavily between the words.

I nodded, and we started toward my house, but twice we had to stop; for once he became sick, and I had to hold him while he retched with nausea, and once he nearly fainted again, leaning heavily against the iron balustrade before a house while he drew great gulps of chilly, fog-soaked air into his lungs.

AT LAST we reached my office, and helping him up to the examination table I set to work. His wounds were more extensive than I had at first supposed. A deep cut, more like the raking of some heavy, blunt-pointed claw than a bite, ran down his face from the right temple almost to the angle of the jaw, and two deep parallel scores showed on his throat above the collar. A little deeper, a little more to one side, and they would have

nicked the anterior jugular. About his hands were several tears, as though they had suffered more from the beast's teeth than had his face and throat, and as I helped him with his jacket I saw his shirt-front had been slit and a long, raking cut scored down his chest, the animal's claws having ripped through the stiff, starched linen as easily as though it had been muslin.

The problem of treatment puzzled me. I could not cauterize the wounds with silver nitrate, and iodine would be without efficiency if the dog were rabid. Finally I compromised by dressing the chest and facial wounds with potassium permanganate solution and using an electric hot-point on the hands, applying laudanum immediately as an anodyne.

"And now, young fellow," I announced as I completed my work, "I think you could do nicely with a tot of brandy. You were drunk enough when you ran into us, heaven knows, but you're cold sober now, and your nerves have been badly jangled, so——"

"So you would be advised to bring another glass," de Grandin's hail sounded from the surgery door. "My nerves have been on edge these many minutes, and in addition I am suffering from an all-consuming thirst, my friend."

The young man gulped the liquor down in one tremendous swallow, seeing which de Grandin gave a shudder of disgust. Drinking fifty-year-old brandy was a rite with him, and to bolt it as if it had been common bootlegged stuff was grave impropriety, almost sacrilege.

"Doctor, do you think that dog had hydrophobia?" our patient asked half diffidently. "He seemed so savage——"

"Hydrophobia is the illness human beings have when bitten by a rabid dog or other animal, *Monsieur,*" de Grandin broke in with a smile. "The beast has rabies, the human victim develops hydrophobia. However, if you wish, we can arrange for you to go to Mercy Hospital early in the morning to take the Pasteur treatment; it is effective and protective if you are infected, quite harmless if you are not."

"Thanks," replied the youth. "I think we'd better, for——"

"Monsieur," the Frenchman cut him short again, "is your name Maxwell, by any chance? Since I first saw you I have been puzzled by your face; now I remember, I saw your picture in *le journal* this morning."

"Yes," said our visitor, "I'm John Maxwell, and, since you saw my picture in the paper, you know that I'm to marry Sarah Leigh on Saturday; so you realize why I'm so anxious to make sure the dog didn't have hydro—rabies, I mean. I don't think Sallie'd want a husband she had to muzzle for fear he'd bite her on the ankle when she came to feed him."

The little Frenchman smiled acknowledgment of the other's pleasantry, but though his lips drew back in the mechanics of a smile, his little, round, blue eyes were fixed and studious.

"Tell me, *Monsieur,*" he asked abruptly, "how came this dog to set upon you in the fog tonight?"

YOUNG Maxwell shivered at the recollection. "Hanged if I know," he answered. "Y'see, the boys gave me a farewell bachelor dinner at the Carteret this evening, and there was the usual amount of speech-making and toast-drinking, and by the time we broke up I was pretty well paralyzed—able to find my way about, but not very steadily, as you know. I said good-night to the bunch at the hotel and started out alone, for I wanted to walk the liquor off. You see"—a flush suffused his blond, good-looking face—"Sallie said she'd wait up for me to tele-

phone her—just like old married folks! —and I didn't want to talk to her while I was still thick-tongued. Ray Suffrige, the chap who—the one you saw later, sir—decided he'd walk home, too, and started off in the other direction, and the rest of 'em left in taxis.

"I'd walked about four blocks, and was getting so I could navigate pretty well, when I bumped into you, then brought up against the railing of a house. While I was hanging onto it, trying to get steady on my legs again, all of a sudden, out of nowhere, came that big police-dog and jumped on me. It didn't bark or give any warning till it leaped at me; then it began growling. I flung my hands up, and it fastened on my sleeve, but luckily the cloth was thick enough to keep its teeth from tearing my arm.

"I never saw such a beast. I've had a tussle or two with savage dogs before, and they always jumped away and rushed in again each time I beat 'em off, but this thing stood on its hind legs and fought me, *like a man.* When it shook its teeth loose from my coat-sleeve it clawed at my face and throat with its forepaws—that's where I got most of my mauling—and kept snapping at me all the time; never backed away or even sank to all-fours once, sir.

"I was still unsteady on my legs, and the brute was heavy as a man; so it wasn't long before it had me down. Every time it bit at me I managed to get my arms in its way; so it did more damage to my clothes than it did to me with its teeth, but it surely clawed me up to the Queen's taste, and I was beginning to tire when you came running up. It would have done me as it did poor Suffrige in a little while, I'm sure."

He paused a moment, then, with a shaking hand, poured out another drink of brandy and tossed it off at a gulp. "I guess I *must* have been drunk," he admitted with a shamefaced grin, "for I could have sworn the thing *talked* to me as it growled."

"Eh? The Devil!" Jules de Grandin sat forward suddenly, eyes wider and rounder than before, if possible, the needle-points of his tightly waxed wheat-blond mustache twitching like the whiskers of an irritated tom-cat. "What is it that you say?"

"Hold on," the other countered, quick blood mounting to his cheeks. "I didn't say it; I said it *seemed* as if its snarls were words."

"*Précisément, exactement,* quite so," returned the Frenchman sharply. "And what was it that he *seemed* to snarl at you, *Monsieur?* Quickly, if you please."

"Well, I was drunk, I admit, but——"

"Ten thousand small blue devils! We bandy words. I have asked you a question; have the courtesy to reply, *Monsieur.*"

"Well, it sounded—sort of—as if it kept repeating Sallie's name, like this——" he gave an imitation of a throaty, growling voice: " 'Sarah Leigh, Sarah Leigh—you'll never marry Sarah Leigh!'

"Ever hear anything so nutty? I reckon I must have had Sallie in my mind, subconsciously, while I was having what I thought was my death-struggle."

It was very quiet for a moment. John Maxwell looked half sullenly, half defiantly from de Grandin to me. De Grandin sat as though lost in contemplation, his small eyes wide and thoughtful, his hands twisting savagely at the waxed ends of his mustache, the tip of his patent-leather evening shoe beating a devil's tattoo on the white-tiled floor. At length, abruptly:

"Did you notice any smell, any peculiar odor, when we went to Monsieur

Maxwell's rescue this evening, Friend Trowbridge?" he demanded.

"Why——" I bent my brows and wagged my head in an effort at remembrance. "Why, no, I didn't——" I stopped, while somewhere from the file-cases of my subconscious memory came a hint of recollection: Soldiers' Park—a damp and drizzling day—the open-air dens of the menagerie. "Wait," I ordered, closing both eyes tightly while I bade my memory catalogue the vague, elusive scent; then: "Yes, there was an odor I've noticed at the zoo in Soldiers' Park; it was the smell of the damp fur of a fox, or wolf!"

De Grandin beat his small, white hands together softly, as though applauding at a play. "Capital, perfect!" he announced. "I smelt it too, when first we did approach, but our senses play strange tricks on us at times, and I needed the corroboration of your nose's testimony, if it could be had. Now——" he turned his fixed, unwinking stare upon me as he asked: "Have you ever seen a wolf's eyes—or a dog's—at night?"

"Yes, of course," I answered wonderingly.

"*Très bien.* And they gleamed with a reflected greenness, something like Madame Pussy's, only not so bright, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

"Yes."

"*Très bon.* Did you see the eyes of what attacked Monsieur Maxwell this evening? Did you observe them?"

"I should say I did," I answered, for never would I forget those fiery, glaring orbs. "They were red, red as fire!"

"Oh, excellent Friend Trowbridge; oh, prince of all the recollectors of the world!" de Grandin cried delightedly. "Your memory serves you perfectly, and upholds my observations to the full. Before, I guessed; I said to me, 'Jules de Grandin, you are generally right, but once in many times you may be wrong. See what Friend Trowbridge has to say.' And you, *parbleu,* you said the very thing I needed to confirm me in my diagnosis.

"*Monsieur,*" he turned to Maxwell with a smile, "you need not fear that you have hydrophobia. No. You were very near to death, a most unpleasant sort of death, but not to death by hydrophobia. *Morbleu,* that would be an added refinement which we need not take into consideration."

"Whatever are you talking about?" I asked in sheer amazement. "You ask me if I noticed the smell that beast gave off, and if I saw its eyes, then tell Mr. Maxwell he needn't fear he's been inoculated. Of all the hare-brained——"

He turned his shoulder squarely on me and smiled assuringly at Maxwell. "You said that you would call your *amoureuse* tonight, *Monsieur;* have you forgotten?" he reminded, then nodded toward the 'phone.

THE young man picked the instrument up, called a number and waited for a moment; then: "John speaking, honey," he announced as we heard a subdued *click* sound from the monophone. Another pause, in which the buzzing of indistinguishable words came faintly to us through the quiet room; then Maxwell turned and motioned me to take up the extension 'phone.

"——and please come right away, dear," I heard a woman's voice plead as I clapped the instrument against my ear. "No, I can't tell you over the 'phone, but I must see you right away, Johnny—I must! You're sure you're all right? Nothing happened to you?"

"Well," Maxwell temporized, "I'm in pretty good shape, everything considered. I had a little tussle with a dog, but——"

"A—*dog?*" Stark, incredulous horror sounded in the woman's fluttering voice. "What sort of dog?"

"Oh, just a dog, you know; not very big and not very little, sort o' betwixt and between, and——"

"You're sure it was a *dog?* Did it look like a—a police-dog, for instance?"

"Well, now you mention it, it *did* look something like a police-dog, or collie, or airedale, or something, but——"

"John, dear, don't try to put me off that way. This is terribly, dreadfully important. Please hurry over—no, don't come out at night—yes, come at once, but be sure not to come alone. Have you a sword, or some sort of steel or iron weapon you can carry for defense when you come?"

Young Maxwell's face betrayed bewilderment. "A sword?" he echoed. "What d'ye think I am, dear, a knight of old? No, I haven't a sword to my name, not even a jack-knife, but—I say, there's a gentleman I met tonight who has a bully little sword; may I bring him along?"

"Oh, yes, please do, dear; and if you can get some one else, bring him too. I'm terribly afraid to have you venture out tonight, dearest, but I have to see you right away!"

"All right," the young man answered. "I'll pop right over, honey."

As he replaced the instrument, he turned bewilderedly to me. "Wonder what the deuce got into Sally?' he asked. "She seemed all broken up about something, and I thought she'd faint when I mentioned my set-to with that dog. What's it mean?"

Jules de Grandin stepped through the doorway connecting surgery with consulting-room, where he had gone to listen to the conversation from the desk extension. His little eyes were serious, his small mouth grimly set. "*Monsieur,*" he announced gravely, "it means that Mademoiselle Sarah knows more than any of us what this business of the Devil is about. Come, let us go to her without delay."

As we prepared to leave the house he paused and rummaged in the hall coat-closet, emerging in a moment, balancing a pair of blackthorn walking-sticks in his hands.

"What——" I began, but he cut me short.

"These may prove useful," he announced, handing one to me, the other to John Maxwell. "If what I damn suspect is so, he will not greatly relish a thwack from one of these upon the head. No, the thorn-bush is especially repugnant to him."

"Humph, I should think it would be particularly repugnant to any one," I answered, weighing the knotty bludgeon in my hand. "By the way, who is 'he'?"

"Mademoiselle Sarah will tell us that," he answered enigmatically. "Are we ready? *Bon,* let us be upon our way."

THE mist which had obscured the night an hour or so before had thinned to a light haze, and a drizzle of rain was commencing as we set out. The Leigh house was less than half a mile from my place, and we made good time as we marched through the damp, cold darkness.

I had known Joel Leigh only through having shared committee appointments with him in the local Republican organization and at the archdeaconry. He had entered the consular service after being retired from active duty with the Marine Corps following a surgeon's certificate of disability, and at the time of his death two years before had been rated as one of the foremost authorities on Near East commercial conditions. Sarah, his daughter, whom I had never met, was, by all accounts, a charming young woman, equally endowed with brains, beauty and

money, and keeping up the family tradition in the big house in Tuscarora Avenue, where she lived with an elderly maiden aunt as duenna.

Leigh's long residence in the East was evidenced in the furnishings of the long, old-fashioned hall, which was like a royal antechamber in miniature. In the softly diffused light from a brass-shaded Turkish lamp we caught gleaming reflections from heavily carved blackwood furniture and the highlights of a marvelously inlaid Indian screen. A carved table flanked by dragon-chairs stood against the wall, the floor was soft as new-mown turf with rugs from China, Turkey and Kurdistan.

"Mis' Sarah's in the library," announced the negro butler who answered our summons at the door, and led us through the hall to the big, high-ceilinged room where Sarah Leigh was waiting. Books lined the chamber's walls from floor to ceiling on three sides; the fourth wall was devoted to a bulging bay-window which overlooked the garden. Before the fire of cedar logs was drawn a deeply padded divan, while flanking it were great armchairs upholstered in red leather. The light which sifted through the meshes of a brazen lamp-shade disclosed a tabouret of Indian mahogany on which a coffee service stood. Before the fire the mistress of the house stood waiting us. She was rather less than average height, but appeared taller because of her fine carriage. Her mannishly close-cropped hair was dark and inclined toward curliness, but as she moved toward us I saw it showed bronze glints in the lamplight. Her eyes were large, expressive, deep hazel, almost brown. But for the look of cynicism, almost hardness, around her mouth, she would have been something more than merely pretty.

Introductions over, Miss Leigh looked from one of us to the other with something like embarrassment in her eyes. "If——" she began, but de Grandin divined her purpose, and broke in:

"*Mademoiselle,* a short time since, we had the good fortune to rescue *Monsieur* your *fiancé* from a dog which I do not think was any dog at all. That same creature, I might add, destroyed a gentleman who had attended Monsieur Maxwell's dinner within ten minutes of the time we drove it off. Furthermore, Monsieur Maxwell is under the impression that this dog-thing talked to him while it sought to slay him. From what we overheard of your message on the telephone, we think you hold the key to this mystery. You may speak freely in our presence, for I am Jules de Grandin, physician and occultist, and my friend, Doctor Trowbridge, has most commendable discretion."

The young woman smiled, and the transformation in her taut, strained face was startling. "Thank you," she replied; "if you're an occultist you will understand, and neither doubt me nor demand explanations of things I can't explain."

She dropped cross-legged to the hearth rug, as naturally as though she were more used to sitting that way than reclining in a chair, and we caught the gleam of a great square garnet on her forefinger as she extended her hand to Maxwell.

"Hold my hand while I'm talking, John," she bade. "It may be for the last time. Then, as he made a gesture of dissent, abruptly:

"I can not marry you—or any one," she announced.

Maxwell opened his lips to protest, but no sound came. I stared at her in wonder, trying futilely to reconcile the agitation she had shown when telephoning with her present deadly, apathetic calm.

Jules de Grandin yielded to his curios-

ity. "Why not, *Mademoiselle?*" he asked. "Who has forbid the banns?"

She shook her head dejectedly and turned a sad-eyed look upon him as she answered: "It's just the continuation of a story which I thought was a closed chapter in my life." For a moment she bent forward, nestling her cheek against young Maxwell's hand; then:

"IT BEGAN when Father was attached to the consulate in Smyrna," she continued. "France and Turkey were both playing for advantage, and Father had to find out what they planned, so he had to hire secret agents. The most successful of them was a young Greek named George Athanasakos, who came from Crete. Why he should have taken such employment was more than we could understand; for he was well educated, apparently a gentleman, and always well supplied with money. He told us he took the work because of his hatred of the Turks, and as he was always successful in getting information, Father didn't ask questions.

"When his work was finished he continued to call at our house as a guest, and I—I really didn't love him, I *couldn't* have, it was just infatuation, meeting him so far from home, and the water and that wonderful Smyrna moonlight, and——"

"Perfectly, *Mademoiselle,* one fully understands," de Grandin supplied softly as she paused, breathless; "and then——"

"Maybe you never succumbed to moonlight and water and strange, romantic poetry and music," she half whispered, her eyes grown wider at the recollection, "but I was only seventeen, and he was very handsome, and—and he swept me off my feet. He had the softest, most musical voice I've ever heard, and the things he said sounded like something written by Byron at his best. One moonlit night when we'd been rowing, he begged me to say I loved him, and—and I did. He held me in his arms and kissed my eyes and lips and throat. It was like being hypnotized and conscious at the same time. Then, just before we said good-night he told me to meet him in an old garden on the outskirts of the city where we sometimes rested when we'd been out riding. The rendezvous was made for midnight, and though I thought it queer that he should want to meet me at that time in such a place—well, girls in love don't ask questions, you know. At least, I didn't.

"There was a full moon the next night, and I was fairly breathless with the beauty of it all when I kept the tryst. I thought I'd come too early, for George was nowhere to be seen when I rode up, but as I jumped down from my horse and looked around I saw something moving in the laurels. It was George, and he'd thrown a cape or cloak of some sort of fur across his shoulders. He startled me dreadfully at first; for he looked like some sort of prowling beast with the animal's head hanging half down across his face, like the beaver of an ancient helmet. It seemed to me, too, that his eyes had taken on a sort of sinister greenish tinge, but when he took me in his arms and kissed me I was reassured.

"Then he told me he was the last of a very ancient clan which had been wiped out warring with the Turks, and that it was a tradition of their blood that the woman they married take a solemn oath before the nuptials could be celebrated. Again I didn't ask questions. It all seemed so wonderfully romantic," she added with a pathetic little smile.

"He had another skin cloak in readiness and dropped it over my shoulders, pulling the head well forward above my face, like a hood. Then he built a little fire of dry twigs and threw some incense

on it. I knelt above the fire and inhaled the aromatic smoke while he chanted some sort of invocation in a tongue I didn't recognize, but which sounded harsh and terrible—like the snarling of a savage dog.

"What happened next I don't remember clearly, for that incense did things to me. The old garden where I knelt seemed to fade away, and in its place appeared a wild and rocky mountain scene where I seemed walking down a winding road. Other people were walking with me, some before, some behind, some beside me, and all were clothed in cloaks of hairy skin like mine. Suddenly, as we went down the mountainside, I began to notice that my companions were dropping to all-fours, like beasts. But somehow it didn't seem strange to me; for, without realizing it, I was running on my hands and feet, too. Not crawling, you know, but actually running—like a dog. As we neared the mountain's foot we ran faster and faster; by the time we reached a little clearing in the heavy woods which fringed the rocky hill we were going like the wind, and I felt myself panting, my tongue hanging from my mouth.

"In the clearing other beasts were waiting for us. One great, hairy creature came trotting up to me, and I was terribly frightened at first, for I recognized it as a mountain wolf, but it nuzzled me with its black snout and licked me, and somehow it seemed like a caress—I liked it. Then it started off across the unplowed field, and I ran after it, caught up with it, and ran alongside. We came to a pool and the beast stopped to drink, and I bent over the water too, lapping it up with my tongue. Then I saw our images in the still pond, and almost died of fright, for the thing beside me was a mountain wolf, and I was a she-wolf!

"My astonishment quickly passed, however, and somehow I didn't seem to mind having been transformed into a beast; for something deep inside me kept urging me on, on to something—I didn't quite know what.

"When we'd drunk we trotted through a little patch of woodland and suddenly my companion sank to the ground in the underbrush and lay there, red tongue lolling from its mouth, green eyes fixed intently on the narrow, winding path beside which we were resting. I wondered what we waited for, and half rose on my haunches to look, but a low, warning growl from the thing beside me warned that something was approaching. It was a pair of farm laborers, Greek peasants I knew them to be by their dress, and they were talking in low tones and looking fearfully about, as though they feared an ambush. When they came abreast of us the beast beside me sprang—so did I.

"I'll never forget the squeaking scream the nearer man gave as I leaped upon him, or the hopeless, terrified expression in his eyes as he tried to fight me off. But I bore him down, sank my teeth into his throat and began slowly tearing at his flesh. I could feel the blood from his torn throat welling up in my mouth, and its hot saltiness was sweeter than the most delicious wine. The poor wretch's struggles became weaker and weaker, and I felt a sort of fierce elation. Then he ceased to fight, and I shook him several times, as a terrier shakes a rat, and when he didn't move or struggle, I tore at his face and throat and chest till my hairy muzzle was one great smear of blood.

"Then, all at once, it seemed as though a sort of thick, white fog were spreading through the forest, blinding me and shutting out the trees and undergrowth and my companion beasts, even the poor boy whom I had killed, and—there I was,

kneeling over the embers of the dying fire in the old Smyrna garden, with the clouds of incense dying down to little curly spirals.

"George was standing across the fire from me, laughing, and the first thing I noticed was that *his lips were smeared with blood.*

"Something hot and salty stung my mouth, and I put my hand up to it. When I brought it down the fingers were red with a thick, sticky liquid.

"I think I must have started to scream; for George jumped over the fire and clapped his hand upon my mouth—*ugh,* I could taste the blood more than ever, then!—and whispered, 'Now you are truly mine, Star of the Morning. Together we have ranged the woods in spirit as we shall one day in body, O true mate of a true *vrykolakas!*'

"*Vrykolakas* is a Greek word hard to translate into English. Literally it means 'the restless dead', but it also means a vampire or a werewolf, and the *vrykolakes* are the most dreaded of all the host of demons with which Greek peasant-legends swarm.

"I shook myself free from him. 'Let me go; don't touch me; I never want to see you again!' I cried.

" 'Nevertheless, you shall see me again—and again and again—Star of the Sea!' he answered with a mocking laugh. 'You belong to me, now, and no one shall take you from me. When I want you I will call, and you will come to me, for'—he looked directly into my eyes, and his own seemed to merge and run together, like two pools of liquid, till they were one great disk of green fire—'thou shalt have no other mate than me, and he who tries to come between us dies. See, I put my mark upon you!'

"He tore my riding-shirt open and pressed his lips against my side, and next instant I felt a biting sting as his teeth met in my flesh. See——"

WITH a frantic, wrenching gesture she snatched at the low collar of her red-silk lounging pajamas, tore the fabric asunder and exposed her ivory flesh. Three inches or so below her left axilla, in direct line with the gently swelling bulge of her firm, high breast, was a small whitened cicatrix, and from it grew a little tuft of long, grayish-brown hair, like hairs protruding from a mole, but unlike any body hairs which I had ever seen upon a human being.

"Grand Dieu," exclaimed de Grandin softly. *"Poil de loup!"*

"Yes," she agreed in a thin, hysterical whisper, "it's wolf's hair! I know. I cut it off and took it to a biochemist in London, and he assured me it was unquestionably the hair of a wolf. I've tried and tried to have the scar removed, but it's useless. I've tried cautery, electrolysis, even surgery, but it disappears for only a little while, then comes again."

For a moment it was still as death in the big dim-lighted room. The little French-gilt clock upon the mantelpiece ticked softly, quickly, like a heart that palpitates with terror, and the hissing of a burning resined log seemed loud and eery as night-wind whistling round a haunted tower. The girl folded the torn silk of her pajama jacket across her breast and pinned it into place; then, simply, desolately, as one who breaks the news of a dear friend's death:

"So I can not marry you, you see, John, dear," she said.

"Why?" asked the young man in a low, fierce voice. "Because that scoundrel drugged you with his devilish incense and made you think you'd turned into a wolf? Because——"

"Because I'd be your murderess if I did so," she responded quaveringly.

"Don't you remember? He said he'd call me when he wanted me, and any one who came between him and me would die. He's come for me, he's called me, John; it was he who attacked you in the fog tonight. Oh, my dear, my dear, I love you so; but I must give you up. It would be murder if I were to marry you!"

"Nonsense!" began John Maxwell bruskly. "If you think that man can——"

Outside the house, seemingly from underneath the library's bow-window, there sounded in the rain-drenched night a wail, long-drawn, pulsating, doleful as the cry of an abandoned soul: "O-u-o—o-u-oo—o-u-o—o-u-oo!" it rose and fell, quavered and almost died away, then resurged with increased force. "O-u-o—o-u-o-o—o-u-o—o-u-oo!"

The woman on the hearth rug cowered like a beaten beast, clutching frantically with fear-numbed fingers at the drugget's pile, half crawling, half writhing toward the brass bars where the cheerful fire burned brightly. "Oh," she whimpered as the mournful ululation died away, "that's he; he called me once before today; now he's come again, and——"

"Mademoiselle, restrain yourself," de Grandin's sharp, whip-like order cut through her mounting terror and brought her back to something like normality. "You are with friends," he added in a softer tone; "three of us are here, and we are a match for any *sacré loup-garou* that ever killed a sheep or made night hideous with his howling. *Parbleu,* but I shall say damn yes. Did I not, all single-handed, already put him to flight once tonight? But certainly. Very well, then, let us talk this matter over calmly, for——"

With the suddenness of a discharged pistol a wild, vibrating howl came through the window once again. "O-u-o—o-u-oo—o-u-o!" it rose against the stillness of the night, diminished to a moan, then suddenly crescendoed upward, from a moan to a wail, from a wail to a howl, despairing, pleading, longing as the cry of a damned spirit, fierce and wild as the rally-call of the fiends of hell.

"Sang du diable, must I suffer interruption when I wish to talk? *Sang des tous les saints*—it is not to be borne!" de Grandin cried furiously, and cleared the distance to the great bay-window in two agile, cat-like leaps.

"Allez!" he ordered sharply, as he flung the casement back and leaned far out into the rainy night. "Be off, before I come down to you. You know me, *hein?* A little while ago you dodged my steel, but——"

A snarling growl replied, and in the clump of rhododendron plants which fringed the garden we saw the baleful glimmer of a pair of fiery eyes.

"Parbleu, you dare defy me—*me?"* the little Frenchman cried, and vaulted nimbly from the window, landing sure-footed as a panther on the rain-soaked garden mold, then charging at the lurking horror as though it had been harmless as a kitten.

"Oh, he'll be killed; no mortal man can stand against a *vrykolakas!"* cried Sarah Leigh, wringing her slim hands together in an agony of terror. "Oh, God in heaven, spare——"

A fusillade of crackling shots cut through her prayer, and we heard a short, sharp yelp of pain, then the voice of Jules de Grandin hurling imprecations in mingled French and English. A moment later:

"Give me a hand, Friend Trowbridge," he called from underneath the window. "It was a simple matter to come down, but climbing back is something else again.

"Merci," he acknowledged as he regained the library and turned his quick,

elfin grin on each of us in turn. Dusting his hands against each other, to clear them of the dampness from the window-sill, he felt for his cigarette case, chose a "Maryland" and tapped it lightly on his finger-nail.

"*Tiens,* I damn think he will know his master's voice in future, that one," he informed us. "I did not quite succeed in killing him to death, unfortunately, but I think that it will be some time before he comes and cries beneath this lady's window again. Yes. Had the *sale poltron* but had the courage to stand against me, I should certainly have killed him; but as it was"—he spread his hands and raised his shoulders eloquently—"it is difficult to hit a running shadow, and he offered little better mark in the darkness. I think I wounded him in the left hand, but I can not surely say."

He paused a moment, then, seeming to remember, turned again to Sarah Leigh with a ceremonious bow. "*Pardon, Mademoiselle,*" he apologized, "you were saying, when we were so discourteously interrupted——" he smiled at her expectantly.

"Doctor de Grandin," wondering incredulity was in the girl's eyes and voice as she looked at him, "you shot him—wounded him?"

"Perfectly, *Mademoiselle,*" he patted the waxed ends of his mustache with affectionate concern, "my marksmanship was execrable, but at least I hit him. That was something."

"But in Greece they used to say—I've always heard that only silver bullets were effective against a *vrykolakas;* either silver bullets or a sword of finely tempered steel, so——"

"*Ah bah!*" he interrupted with a laugh. "What did they know of modern ordnance, those old-time ritualists? Silver bullets were decreed because silver is a harder metal than lead, and the olden guns they used in ancient days were not adapted to shoot balls of iron. The pistols of today shoot slugs encased in cupronickel, far harder than the best of iron, and with a striking-force undreamed of in the days when firearms were a new invention. *Tiens,* had the good Saint George possessed a modern military rifle he could have slain the dragon at his leisure while he stood a mile away. Had Saint Michel had a machine-gun, his victory over Lucifer could have been accomplished in thirty seconds by the watch."

Having delivered himself of this scandalous opinion, he reseated himself on the divan and smiled at her, for all the world like the family cat which has just breakfasted on the household canary.

"And how was it that this so valiant runner-away-from-Jules-de-Grandin announced himself to you, *Mademoiselle?*" he asked.

"I WAS dressing to go out this morning," she replied, "when the 'phone rang, and when I answered it no one replied to my 'hello.' Then, just as I began to think they'd given some one a wrong number, and was about to put the instrument down, there came one of those awful, wailing howls across the wire. No word at all, sir, just that long-drawn, quavering howl, like what you heard a little while ago.

"You can imagine how it frightened me. I'd almost managed to put George from my mind, telling myself that the vision of lycanthropy which I had in Smyrna was some sort of hypnotism, and that there really weren't such things as werewolves, and even if there were, this was practical America, where I needn't fear them—then came that dreadful howl, the sort of howl I'd heard—and given!—in my vision in the Smyrna garden, and I knew there *are* such things

as werewolves, and that one of them possessed me, soul and body, and that I'd have to go to him if he demanded it.

"Most of all, though, I thought of John, for if the werewolf were in America he'd surely read the notice of our coming marriage, and the first thing I remembered was his threat to kill any one who tried to come between us."

She turned to Maxwell with a pensive smile. "You know how I've been worrying you all day, dear," she asked, "how I begged you not to go out to that dinner tonight, and when you said you must, how I made you promise that you'd call me as soon as you got home, but on no account to call me before you were safely back in your apartment?

"I've been in a perfect agony of apprehension all evening," she told us, "and when John called from Doctor Trowbridge's office I felt as though a great weight had been lifted from my heart."

"And did you try to trace the call?" the little Frenchman asked.

"Yes, but it had been dialed from a downtown pay station, so it was impossible to find it."

De Grandin took his chin between his thumb and forefinger and gazed thoughtfully at the tips of his patent-leather evening shoes. "U'm?" he murmured; then: "What does he look like, this so gallant persecutor of women, *Mademoiselle?* 'He is handsome,' you have said, which is of interest, certainly, but not especially instructive. Can you be more specific? Since he is a Greek, one assumes that he is dark, but——"

"No, he's not," she interrupted. "His eyes are blue and his hair is rather light, though his beard—he used to wear one, though he may be smooth-shaven now—is quite dark, almost black. Indeed, in certain lights it seems to have an almost bluish tinge."

"Ah, so? *Une barbe bleu?*" de Grandin answered sharply. "One might have thought as much. Such beards, *ma chère,* are the sign-manual of those who traffic with the Devil. Gilles de Retz, the vilest monster who ever cast insult on the human race by wearing human form, was light of hair and blue-black as to beard. It is from him we get the most unpleasant fairy-tale of Bluebeard, though the gentleman who dispatched his wives for showing too much curiosity was a lamb and sucking dove beside the one whose name he bears.

"Very well. Have you a photograph of him, by any happy chance?"

"No; I did have one, but I burned it years ago."

"A pity, *Mademoiselle;* our task would be made easier if we had his likeness as a guide. But we shall find him otherwise."

"How?" asked Maxwell and I in chorus.

"There was a time," he answered, "when the revelations of a patient to his doctor were considered privileged communications. Since prohibition came to blight your land, however, and the gangster's gun has written history in blood, the physicians are required to note the names and addresses of those who come to them with gunshot wounds, and this information is collected by the police each day. Now, we know that I have wounded this one. He will undoubtlessly seek medical assistance for his hurt. *Voilà,* I shall go down to the police headquarters, look upon the records of those treated for injuries from bullets, and by a process of elimination we shall find him. You apprehend?"

"But suppose he doesn't go to a physician?" young Maxwell interposed.

"In that event we have to find some other way to find him," de Grandin an-

swered with a smile, "but that is a stream which we shall cross when we have arrived upon its shore. Meantime"—he rose and bowed politely to our hostess—"it is getting late, *Mademoiselle,* and we have trespassed on your time too long already. We shall convoy Monsieur Maxwell safely home, and see him lock his door, and if you will keep your doors and windows barred, I do not think that you have anything to fear. The gentleman who seems also to be a wolf has his wounded paw to nurse, and that will keep him busy the remainder of the night."

With a movement of his eyes he bade me leave the room, following closely on my heels and closing the door behind him. "If we must separate them the least which we can do is give them twenty little minutes for good-night," he murmured as we donned our mackintoshes.

"Twenty minutes?" I expostulated. "Why, he could say good-night to twenty girls in twenty minutes!"

"Oui-da, certainement; or a hundred," he agreed, "but not to the one girl, my good friend. *Ah bah,* Friend Trowbridge, did you never love; did you never worship at the small, white feet of some beloved woman? Did you never feel your breath come faster and your blood pound wildly at your temples as you took her in your arms and put your lips against her mouth? If not—*grand Dieu des porcs*—then you have never lived at all, though you be older than Methuselah!"

RUNNING our quarry to earth proved a harder task than we had anticipated. Daylight had scarcely come when de Grandin visited the police, but for all he discovered he might have stayed at home. Only four cases of gunshot wounds had been reported during the preceding night, and two of the injured men were negroes, a third a voluble but undoubtedly Italian laborer who had quarreled with some fellow countrymen over a card game, while the fourth was a thin-faced, tight-lipped gangster who eyed us saturninely and murmured, "Never mind who done it; I'll be seein' 'im," evidently under the misapprehension that we were emissaries of the police.

The next day and the next produced no more results. Gunshot wounds there were, but none in the hand, where de Grandin declared he had wounded the nocturnal visitant, and though he followed every lead assiduously, in every case he drew a blank.

He was almost beside himself on the fourth day of fruitless search; by evening I was on the point of prescribing triple bromides, for he paced the study restlessly, snapping his fingers, tweaking the waxed ends of his mustache till I made sure he would pull the hairs loose from his lip, and murmuring appalling blasphemies in mingled French and English.

At length, when I thought that I could stand his restless striding no longer, diversion came in the form of a telephone call. He seized the instrument peevishly, but no sooner had he barked a sharp *"Allo?"* than his whole expression changed and a quick smile ran across his face, like sunshine breaking through a cloud.

"But certainly; of course, assuredly!" he cried delightedly. Then, to me:

"Your hat and coat, Friend Trowbridge, and hurry, *pour l'amour d'un têtard*—they are marrying!"

"Marrying?' I echoed wonderingly. "Who——"

"Who but Mademoiselle Sarah and Monsieur Jean, *parbleu?"* he answered with a grin. *"Oh, la, la,* at last they show some sense, those ones. He has broken her resistance down, and she consents, werewolf or no werewolf. Now

we shall surely make the long nose at that *sacré singe* who howled beneath her window when we called upon her!"

The ceremony was to be performed in the sacristy of St. Barnabas' Church, for John and Sarah, shocked and saddened by the death of young Fred Suffrige, who was to have been their best man, had recalled the invitations and decided on a private wedding with only her aunt and his mother present in addition to de Grandin and me.

"DEARLY beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God and in the face of this company to join together this man and this woman in holy matrimony," began the rector, Doctor Higginbotham, who, despite the informality of the occasion, was attired in all the panoply of a high church priest and accompanied by two gorgeously accoutered and greatly interested choir-boys who served as acolytes. "Into this holy estate these two persons come now to be joined. If any man can show just cause why they should not lawfully be joined together, let him now speak, or else hereafter for ever hold his peace——"

"Jeez!" exclaimed the choir youth who stood upon the rector's left, letting fall the censer from his hands and dodging nimbly back, as from a threatened blow.

The interruption fell upon the solemn scene like a bombshell at a funeral, and one and all of us looked at the cowering youngster, whose eyes were fairly bulging from his face and whose ruddy countenance had gone a sickly, pasty gray, so that the thick-strewn freckles started out in contrast, like spots of rouge upon a corpse's pallid cheeks.

"Why, William——" Doctor Higginbotham began in a shocked voice; but:

Rat, tat-tat! sounded the sudden sharp clatter of knuckles against the windowpane, and for the first time we realized it had been toward this window the boy had looked when his sacrilegious exclamation broke in on the service.

Staring at us through the glass we saw a great, gray wolf! Yet it was not a wolf, for about the lupine jaws and jowls was something hideously reminiscent of a human face, and the greenish, phosphorescent glow of those great, glaring eyes had surely never shone in any face, animal or human. As I looked, breathless, the monster raised its head, and strangling horror gripped my throat with fiery fingers as I saw a human-seeming neck beneath it. Long and grisly-thin it was, corded and sinewed like the desiccated gula of a lich, and, like the face, covered with a coat of gray-brown fur. Then a hand, hair-covered like the throat and face, slim as a woman's—or a mummy's!—but terribly misshapen, fingers tipped with blood-red talon-nails, rose up and struck the glass again. My scalp was fairly crawling with sheer terror, and my breath came hot and sulfurous in my throat as I wondered how much longer the frail glass could stand against the impact of those bony, hair-gloved hands.

A strangled scream behind me sounded from Sarah's aunt, Miss Leigh, and I heard the muffled thud as she toppled to the floor in a dead faint, but I could no more turn my gaze from the horror at the window than the fascinated bird can tear its eyes from the serpent's numbing stare.

Another sighing exclamation and another thudding impact. John Maxwell's mother was unconscious on the floor beside Miss Leigh, but still I stood and stared in frozen terror at the thing beyond the window.

Doctor Higginbotham's teeth were chattering, and his ruddy, plethoric countenance was death-gray as he faced the staring horror, but he held fast to his faith.

"Conjuro te, sceleratissime, abire ad tuum locum"—he began the sonorous Latin exorcism, signing himself with his right hand and advancing his pectoral cross toward the thing at the window with his left—"I exorcise thee, most foul spirit, creature of darkness——"

The corners of the wolf-thing's devilish eyes contracted in a smile of malevolent amusement, and a rim of scarlet tongue flicked its black muzzle. Doctor Higginbotham's exorcism, bravely begun, ended on a wheezing, stifled syllable, and he stared in round-eyed fascination, his thick lips, blue with terror, opening and closing, but emitting no sound.

"Sang d'un cochon, not that way, *Monsieur*—this!" cried Jules de Grandin, and the roar of his revolver split the paralysis of quiet which had gripped the little chapel. A thin, silvery tinkle of glass sounded as the bullet tore through the window, and the grisly face abruptly disappeared, but from somewhere in the outside dark there echoed back a braying howl which seemed to hold a sort of obscene laughter in its quavering notes.

"Sapristi! Have I missed him?" de Grandin asked incredulously. "No matter; he is gone. On with the service, *Monsieur le Curé.* I do not think we shall be interrupted further."

"No!" Doctor Higginbotham backed away from Sarah Leigh as though her breath polluted him. "I can perform no marriage until that thing has been explained. Some one here is haunted by a devil—a malign entity from hell which will not heed the exorcism of the Church—and until I'm satisfied concerning it, and that you're all good Christians, there'll be no ceremony in this church!"

"Eh bien, Monsieur, who can say what constitutes a good Christian?" de Grandin smiled unpleasantly at Doctor Higginbotham. "Certainly one who lacks in charity as you do can not be competent to judge. Have it as you wish. As soon as we have recovered these fainting ladies, we shall leave, and may the Devil grill me on the grates of hell if ever we come back until you have apologized."

Two hours later, as we sat in the Leigh library, Sarah dried her eyes and faced her lover with an air of final resolution: "You see, my dear, it's utterly impossible for me to marry you, or any one," she said. "That awful thing will dog my steps, and——"

"My poor, sweet girl, I'm more determined than ever to marry you!" John broke in. "If you're to be haunted by a thing like that, you need me every minute, and——"

"Bravo!" applauded Jules de Grandin. "Well said, *mon vieux,* but we waste precious time. Come, let us go."

"Where?" asked John Maxwell, but the little Frenchman only smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

"To Maidstone Crossing, quickly, if you please, my friend," he whispered when he had led the lovers to my car and seen solicitously to their comfortable seating in the tonneau. "I know a certain justice of the peace there who would marry the Witch of Endor to the Emperor Nero though all the wolves which ever plagued Red Riding-Hood forbade the banns, provided only we supply him with sufficient fee."

Two hours' drive brought us to the little hamlet of Maidstone Crossing, and de Grandin's furious knocking on the door of a small cottage evoked the presence of a lank, lean man attired in a pair of corduroy trousers drawn hastily above the folds of a canton-flannel nightshirt.

A whispered colloquy between the rustic and the slim, elegant little Parisian; then: "O. K., Doc," the justice of the

peace conceded. "Bring 'em in; I'll marry 'em, an'—hey, Sam'l!" he called up the stairs. "C'mon down, an' bring yer shotgun. There's a weddin' goin' to be pulled off, an' they tell me some fresh guys may try to interfere!"

"Sam'l," a lank, lean youth whose costume duplicated that of his father, descended the stairway grinning, an automatic shotgun cradled in the hollow of his arm. "D'ye expect any real rough stuff?" he asked.

"Seems like they're apt to try an' set a dawg on 'em," his father answered, and the younger man grinned cheerfully.

"Dawgs, is it?" he replied. "Dawgs is my dish. Go on, Pap, do yer stuff. Good luck, folks," he winked encouragingly at John and Sarah and stepped out on the porch, his gun in readiness.

"Do you take this here woman fer yer lawful, wedded wife?" the justice inquired of John Maxwell, and when the latter answered that he did:

"An' do you take this here now man to be yer wedded husband?" he asked Sarah.

"I do," the girl responded in a trembling whisper, and the roaring bellow of a shotgun punctuated the brief pause before the squire concluded:

"Then by virtue of th' authority vested in me by th' law an' constitootion of this state, I do declare ye man an' wife—an' whoever says that ye ain't married lawfully 's a danged liar," he added as a sort of afterthought.

"What wuz it that ye shot at, Sam'l?" asked the justice as, enriched by fifty dollars, and grinning appreciatively at the evening's profitable business, he ushered us from the house.

"Durned if I know, Pap," the other answered. "Looked kind o' funny to me. He wuz about a head taller'n me—an' I'm six foot two—an' thin as Job's turkey-hen, to boot. His clothes looked skintight on 'im, an' he had on a cap, or sumpin with a peak that stuck out over his face. I first seen 'im comin' up th' road, kind o' lookin' this way an' that, like as if he warn't quite certain o' his way. Then, all of a suddent, he kind o' stopped an' threw his head back, like a dawg sniffin' th' air, an' started to go down on his all-fours, like he wuz goin' to sneak up on th' house. So I hauls off an' lets 'im have a tickle o' buckshot. Don't know whether I hit 'im or not, an' I'll bet he don't, neether; he sure didn't waste no time stoppin' to find out. Could he run! I'm tellin' ye, that feller must be in Harrisonville by now, if he kep' on goin' like he started!"

Two days of feverish activity ensued. Last-minute traveling arrangements had to be made, and passports for "John Maxwell and wife, Harrisonville, New Jersey, U. S. A.," obtained. De Grandin spent every waking hour with the newly married couple and even insisted on occupying a room in the Leigh house at night; but his precautions seemed unnecessary, for not so much as a whimper sounded under Sarah's window, and though the little Frenchman searched the garden every morning, there was no trace of unfamiliar footprints, either brute or human, to be found.

"Looks as if Sallie's Greek boy friend knows when he's licked and has decided to quit following her about," John Maxwell grinned as he and Sarah, radiant with happiness, stood upon the deck of the *Ile de France*.

"One hopes so," de Grandin answered with a smile. "Good luck, *mes amis*, and may your *lune de miel* shine as brightly throughout all your lives as it does this night.

"*La lune*—ha?" he repeated half mus-

ingly, half with surprize, as though he just remembered some important thing which had inadvertently slipped his memory. "May I speak a private warning in your ear, Friend Jean?" He drew the bridegroom aside and whispered earnestly a moment.

"Oh, bosh!" the other laughed as they rejoined us. "That's all behind us, Doctor; you'll see; we'll never hear a sound from him. He's got *me* to deal with now, not just poor Sarah."

"Bravely spoken, little cabbage!" the Frenchman applauded. *"Bon voyage."* But there was a serious expression on his face as we went down the gangway.

"What was the private warning you gave John?" I asked as we left the French Line piers. "He didn't seem to take it very seriously."

"No," he conceded. "I wish he had. But youth is always brave and reckless in its own conceit. It was about the moon. She has a strange influence on lycanthropy. The werewolf metamorphoses more easily in the full of the moon than at any other time, and those who may have been affected with his virus, though even faintly, are most apt to feel its spell when the moon is at the full. I warned him to be particularly careful of his lady on moonlit nights, and on no account to go anywhere after dark unless he were armed.

"The werewolf is really an inferior demon," he continued as we boarded the Hoboken ferry. "Just what he is we do not know with certainty, though we know he has existed from the earliest times; for many writers of antiquity mention him. Sometimes he is said to be a magical wolf who has the power to become a man. More often he is said to be a man who can become a wolf at times, sometimes of his own volition, sometimes at stated seasons, even against his will. He has dreadful powers of destructiveness; for the man who is also a wolf is ten times more deadly than the wolf who is only a wolf. He has the wolf's great strength and savagery, but human cunning with it. At night he quests and kills his prey, which is most often his fellow man, but sometimes sheep or hares, or his ancient enemy, the dog. By day he hides his villainy—and the location of his lair—under human guise.

"However, he has this weakness: strong and ferocious, cunning and malicious as he is, he can be killed as easily as any natural wolf. A sharp sword will slay him, a well-aimed bullet puts an end to his career; the wood of the thorn-bush and the mountain ash are so repugnant to him that he will slink away if beaten or merely threatened with a switch of either. Weapons efficacious against an ordinary physical foe are potent against him, while charms and exorcisms which would put a true demon to flight are powerless.

"You saw how he mocked at Monsieur Higginbotham in the sacristy the other night, by example. But he did not stop to bandy words with me. Oh, no. He knows that I shoot straight and quick, and he had already felt my lead on one occasion. If young Friend Jean will always go well-armed, he has no need to fear; but if he be taken off his guard—*eh bien,* we can not always be on hand to rescue him as we did the night when we first met him. No, certainly."

"But why do you fear for Sarah?" I persisted.

"I hardly know," he answered. "Perhaps it is that I have what you Americans so drolly call the hunch. Werewolves sometimes become werewolves by the aid of Satan, that they may kill their enemies while in lupine form, or satisfy their natural lust for blood and cruelty while

disguised as beasts. Some are transformed as the result of a curse upon themselves or their families, a few are metamorphosed by accident. These are the most unfortunate of all. In certain parts of Europe, notably in Greece, Russia and the Balkan states, the very soil seems cursed with lycanthropic power. There are certain places where, if the unwary traveler lies down to sleep, he is apt to wake up with the curse of werewolfism on him. Certain streams and springs there are which, if drunk from, will render the drinker liable to transformation at the next full moon, and regularly thereafter. You will recall that in the dream, or vision, which Madame Sarah had while in the Smyrna garden so long ago, she beheld herself drinking from a woodland pool? I do not surely know, my friend, I have not even good grounds for suspicion, but something—something which I can not name—tells me that in some way this poor one, who is so wholly innocent, has been branded with the taint of lycanthropy. How it came about I can not say, but——"

My mind had been busily engaged with other problems, and I had listened to his disquisition on lycanthropy with something less than full attention. Now, suddenly aware of the thing which puzzled me, I interrupted:

"Can you explain the form that werewolf—if that's what it was—took on different occasions? The night we met John Maxwell he was fighting for his life with as true a wolf as any there are in the zoological gardens. O'Brien, the policeman, saw it, too, and shot at it, after it had killed Fred Suffrige. It was a sure-enough wolf when it howled under Sarah's window and you wounded it; yet when it interrupted the wedding it was an awful combination of wolf and man, or man and wolf, and the thing the justice's son drove off with his shotgun was the same, according to his description."

Surprizingly, he did not take offense at my interruption. Instead, he frowned in thoughtful silence at the dashboard lights a moment; then: "Sometimes the werewolf is completely transformed from man to beast," he answered; "sometimes he is a hideous combination of the two, but always he is a fiend incarnate. My own belief is that this one was only partly transformed when we last saw him because he had not time to wait complete metamorphosis. It is possible he could not change completely, too, because——" he broke off and pointed at the sky significantly.

"Well?" I demanded as he made no further effort to proceed.

"*Non*, it is not well," he denied, "but it may be important. Do you observe the moon tonight?"

"Why, yes."

"What quarter is it in?"

"The last; it's waning fast."

"*Précisément.* As I was saying, it may be that his powers to metamorphose himself were weakened because of the waning of the moon. Remember, if you please, his power for evil is at its height when the moon is at the full, and as it wanes, his powers become less and less. At the darkening of the moon, he is at his weakest, and then is the time for us to strike—if only we could find him. But he will lie well hidden at such times, never fear. He is clever with a devilish cunningness, that one."

"Oh, you're fantastic!" I burst out.

"You say so, having seen what you have seen?"

"Well, I'll admit we've seen some things which are mighty hard to explain," I conceded, "but——"

"But we are arrived at home; Monsieur and Madame Maxwell are safe upon

the ocean, and I am vilely thirsty," he broke in. "Come, let us take a drink and go to bed, my friend."

WITH midwinter came John and Sarah Maxwell, back from their honeymoon in Paris and on the Riviera. A week before their advent, notices in the society columns told of their homecoming, and a week after their return an engraved invitation apprised de Grandin and me that the honor of our presence was requested at a reception in the Leigh mansion, where they had taken residence. ". . . and please come early and stay late; there are a million things I want to talk about," Sarah pencilled at the bottom of our card.

Jules de Grandin was more than usually ornate on the night of the reception. His London-tailored evening clothes were knife-sharp in their creases; about his neck hung the insignia of the *Legion d'Honneur;* a row of miniature medals, including the French and Belgian war crosses, the *Médaille Militaire* and the Italian Medal of Valor, decorated the left breast of his faultless evening coat; his little, wheat-blond mustache was waxed to needle-sharpness and his sleek blond hair was brilliantined and brushed till it fitted flat upon his shapely little head as a skull-cap of beige satin.

Lights blazed from every window of the house as we drew up beneath the porte-cochère. Inside all was laughter, staccato conversation and the odd, not unpleasant odor rising from the mingling of the hundred or more individual scents affected by the women guests. Summer was still near enough for the men to retain the tan of mountain and seashore on their faces and for a velvet vestige of veneer of painfully acquired sun-tan to show upon the women's arms and shoulders.

We tendered our congratulations to the homing newlyweds; then de Grandin plucked me by the sleeve. "Come away, my friend," he whispered in an almost tragic voice. "Come quickly, or these thirsty ones will have drunk up all the punch containing rum and champagne and left us only lemonade!"

The evening passed with pleasant swiftness, and guests began to leave. "Where's Sallie—seen her?" asked John Maxwell, interrupting a rather Rabelaisian story which de Grandin was retailing with gusto to several appreciative young men in the conservatory. "The Carter-Brooks are leaving, and——"

De Grandin brought his story to a close with the suddenness of a descending theater curtain, and a look of something like consternation shone in his small, round eyes. "She is not here?" he asked sharply. "When did you last see her?"

"Oh," John answered vaguely, "just a little while ago; we danced the 'Blue Danube' together, then she went upstairs for something, and——"

"Quick, swiftly!" de Grandin interrupted. *"Pardon, Messieurs,"* he bowed to his late audience and, beckoning me, strode toward the stairs.

"I say, what's the rush——" began John Maxwell, but:

"Every reason under heaven," the Frenchman broke in shortly. To me: "Did you observe the night outside, Friend Trowbridge?"

"Why, yes," I answered. "Its a beautiful moonlit night, almost bright as day, and——"

"And there you are, for the love of ten thousand pigs!" he cut in. "Oh, I am the stupid-headed fool, me! Why did I let her from my sight?"

We followed in wondering silence as he climbed the stairs, hurried down the hall toward Sarah's room and paused be-

fore her door. He raised his hand to rap, but the portal swung away, and a girl stood staring at us from the threshold.

"Did it pass you?" she asked, regarding us in wide-eyed wonder.

"Pardon, Mademoiselle?" de Grandin countered. "What is it that you ask?"

"Why, did you see that lovely collie, it——"

"Cher Dieu," the words were like a groan upon the little Frenchman's lips as he looked at her in horror. Then, recovering himself: "Proceed, *Mademoiselle,* it was of a dog you spoke?"

"Yes," she returned. "I came upstairs to freshen up, and found I'd lost my compact somewhere, so I came to Sallie's room to get some powder. She'd come up a few moments before, and I was positive I'd find her here, but——" she paused in puzzlement a moment; then: "But when I came in there was no one here. Her dress was lying on the chaise-longue there, as though she'd slipped it off, and by the window, looking out with its paws up on the sill, was the loveliest silver collie.

"I didn't know you had a dog, John," she turned to Maxwell. "When did you get it? It's the loveliest creature, but it seemed to be afraid of me; for when I went to pat it, it slunk away, and before I realized it had bolted through the door, which I'd left open. It ran down the hall."

"A dog?" John Maxwell answered bewilderedly. "We haven't any dog, Nell; it must have been——"

"Never mind what it was," de Grandin interrupted as the girl went down the hall, and as she passed out of hearing he seized us by the elbows and fairly thrust us into Sarah's room, closing the door quickly behind us.

"WHAT——" began John Maxwell, but the Frenchman motioned him to silence.

"Behold, regard each item carefully; stamp them upon your memories," he ordered, sweeping the charming chamber with his sharp, stock-taking glance.

A fire burned brightly in the open grate, parchment-shaded lamps diffused soft light. Upon the bed there lay a pair of rose-silk pajamas, with a sheer crêpe negligée beside them. A pair of satin mules were placed toes in upon the bedside rug. Across the chaise-longue was draped, as though discarded in the utmost haste, the white-satin evening gown that Sarah had worn. Upon the floor beside the lounge were crumpled wisps of ivory crêpe de Chine, her bandeau and trunks. Sarah, being wholly modern, had worn no stockings, but her white-and-silver evening sandals lay beside the lingerie, one on its sole, as though she had stepped out of it, the other on its side, gaping emptily, as though kicked from her little pink-and-white foot in panic haste. There was something ominous about that silent room; it was like a body from which the spirit had departed, still beautiful and warm, but lifeless.

"Humph," Maxwell muttered, "the Devil knows where she's gone——"

"He knows very, exceedingly well, I have no doubt," de Grandin interrupted. "But we do not. Now—*ah? Ah-ah-ah?"* his exclamation rose steadily, thinning to a sharpness like a razor's cutting-edge. "What have we here?"

Like a hound upon the trail, guided by scent alone, he crossed the room and halted by the dressing-table. Before the mirror stood an uncorked flask of perfume, lovely thing of polished crystal decorated with silver basketwork. From its open neck there rose a thin but penetrating scent, not wholly sweet nor wholly

acrid, but a not unpleasant combination of the two, as though musk and flower-scent had each lent it something of their savors.

The little Frenchman put it to his nose, then set it down with a grimace. "Name of an Indian pig, how comes this devil's brew here?" he asked.

"Oh, that?" Maxwell answered. "Hanged if I know. Some unknown admirer of Sallie's sent it to her. It came today, all wrapped up like something from a jeweler's. Rather pleasant-smelling, isn't it?"

De Grandin looked at him as Torquemada might have looked at one accusing him of loving Martin Luther. "Did you by any chance make use of it, *Monsieur?*" he asked in an almost soundless whisper.

"I? Good Lord, do I look like the sort of he-thing who'd use perfume?" the other asked.

"*Bien,* I did but ask to know," de Grandin answered as he jammed the silver-mounted stopper in the bottle and thrust the flask into his trousers pocket.

"But where the deuce *is* Sallie?" the young husband persisted. "She's changed her clothes, that's certain; but what did she go out for, and if she didn't go out, where is she?"

"Ah, it may be that she had a sudden feeling of faintness, and decided to go out into the air," the Frenchman temporized. "Come, *Monsieur,* the guests are waiting to depart, and you must say *adieu.* Tell them that your lady is indisposed, make excuses, tell them anything, but get them out all quickly; we have work to do."

JOHN MAXWELL lied gallantly, de Grandin and I standing at his side to prevent any officious dowager from mounting the stairs and administering home-made medical assistance. At last, when all were gone, the young man turned to Jules de Grandin, and:

"Now, out with it," he ordered gruffly. "I can tell by your manner something serious has happened. What is it, man; what is it?"

De Grandin patted him upon the shoulder with a mixture of affection and commiseration in the gesture. "Be brave, *mon vieux,*" he ordered softly. "It is the worst. He has her in his power; she has gone to join him, for—*pitié de Dieu!*—she has become like him."

"Wha—what?" the husband quavered. "You mean she—that Sallie, my Sallie, has become a were——" his voice balked at the final syllable, but de Grandin's nod confirmed his guess.

"*Hélas,* you have said it, my poor friend," he murmured pitifully.

"But how?—when?—I thought surely we'd driven him off——" the young man faltered, then stopped, horror choking the words back in his throat.

"Unfortunately, no," de Grandin told him. "He was driven off, certainly, but not diverted from his purpose. Attend me."

From his trousers pocket he produced the vial of perfume, uncorked it and let its scent escape into the room. "You recognize it, *hein?*" he asked.

"No, I can't say I do," Maxwell answered.

"Do you, Friend Trowbridge?"

I shook my head.

"Very well. I do, to my sorrow."

He turned once more to me. "The night Monsieur and Madame Maxwell sailed upon the *Ile de France,* you may recall I was explaining how the innocent became werewolves at times?" he reminded.

"Yes, and I interrupted to ask about the different shapes that thing assumed," I nodded.

"You interrupted then," he agreed soberly, "but you will not interrupt now. Oh, no. You will listen while I talk. I had told you of the haunted dells where travelers may unknowingly become werewolves, of the streams from which the drinker may receive contagion, but you did not wait to hear of *les fleurs des loups,* did you?"

"*Fleurs des loups*—wolf-flowers?" I asked.

"*Précisément,* wolf-flowers. Upon those cursed mountains grows a kind of flower which, plucked and worn at the full of the moon, transforms the wearer into a *loup-garou.* Yes. One of these flowers, known popularly as the *fleur de sang,* or blood-flower, because of its red petals, resembles the marguerite, or daisy, in form; the other is a golden yellow, and is much like the snapdragon. But both have the same fell property, both have the same strong, sweet, fascinating scent.

"This, my friends," he passed the opened flagon underneath our noses, "is a perfume made from the sap of those accursed flowers. It is the highly concentrated venom of their devilishness. One applying it to her person, anointing lips, ears, hair and hands with it, as women wont, would as surely be translated into wolfish form as though she wore the cursed flower whence the perfume comes. Yes.

"That silver collie of which the young girl spoke, *Monsieur*"—he turned a fixed, but pitying look upon John Maxwell—"she was your wife, transformed into a wolf-thing by the power of this perfume.

"Consider: Can you not see it all? Balked, but not defeated, the vile *vrykolakas* is left to perfect his revenge while you are on your honeymoon. He knows that you will come again to Harrisonville; he need not follow you. Accordingly, he sends to Europe for the essence of these flowers, prepares a philtre from it, and sends it to Madame Sarah today. Its scent is novel, rather pleasing; women like strange, exotic scents. She uses it. Anon, she feels a queerness. She does not realize that it is the metamorphosis which comes upon her, she only knows that she feels vaguely strange. She goes to her room. Perhaps she puts the perfume on her brow again, as women do when they feel faint; then, *pardieu,* then there comes the change all quickly, for the moon is full tonight, and the essence of the flowers very potent.

"She doffed her clothes, you think? *Mais non,* they fell from her! A woman's raiment does not fit a wolf; it falls off from her altered form, and we find it on the couch and on the floor.

"That other girl comes to the room, and finds poor Madame Sarah, transformed to a wolf, gazing sadly from the window—*la pauvre,* she knew too well who waited outside in the moonlight for her, and she must go to him! Her friend puts out a hand to pet her, but she shrinks away. She feels she is 'unclean', a thing apart, one of 'that multitudinous herd not yet made fast in hell'—*les loups-garous!* And so she flies through the open door of her room, flies where? Only *le bon Dieu*—and the Devil, who is master of all werewolves—know!"

"But we must find her!" Maxwell wailed. "We've *got* to find her!"

"Where are we to look?" de Grandin spread his hands and raised his shoulders. "The city is wide, and we have no idea where this wolf-man makes his lair. The werewolf travels fast, my friend; they may be miles away by now."

"I don't care a damn what you say, I'm going out to look for her!" Maxwell declared as he rose from his seat and strode to the library table, from the draw-

er of which he took a heavy pistol. "You shot him once and wounded him, so I know he's vulnerable to bullets, and when I find him——"

"But certainly," the Frenchman interrupted. "We heartily agree with you, my friend. But let us first go to Doctor Trowbridge's house where we, too, may secure weapons. Then we shall be delighted to accompany you upon your hunt."

As we started for my place he whispered in my ear: "Prepare the knock-out drops as soon as we are there, Friend Trowbridge. It would be suicide for him to seek that monster now. He can not hit a barn-side with a pistol, can not even draw it quickly from his pocket. His chances are not one in a million if he meets the wolf, and if we let him go we shall be playing right into the adversary's hands."

I nodded agreement as we drove along, and when I'd parked the car, I turned to Maxwell. "Better come in and have a drink before we start," I invited. "It's cold tonight, and we may not get back soon."

"All right," agreed the unsuspecting youth. "But make it quick, I'm itching to catch sight of that damned fiend. When I meet him he won't get off as easily as he did in his brush with Doctor de Grandin."

HASTILY I concocted a punch of Jamaica rum, hot water, lemon juice and sugar, adding fifteen grains of chloral hydrate to John Maxwell's and hoping the sugar and lemon would disguise its taste while the pungent rum would hide its odor. "To our successful quest," de Grandin proposed, raising his steaming glass and looking questioningly at me for assurance that the young man's drink was drugged.

Maxwell raised his goblet, but ere he set it to his lips there came a sudden interruption. An oddly whining, whimpering noise it was, accompanied by a scratching at the door, as though a dog were outside in the night and importuning for admission.

"Ah?" de Grandin put his glass down on the hall table and reached beneath his left armpit where the small but deadly Belgian automatic pistol nestled in its shoulder-holster. *"Ah-ha?* We have a visitor, it seems." To me he bade:

"Open the door, wide and quickly, Friend Trowbridge; then stand away, for I shall likely shoot with haste, and it is not your estimable self that I desire to kill."

I followed his instructions, but instead of the gray horror I had expected at the door, I saw a slender canine form with hair so silver-gray that it was almost white, which bent its head and wagged its tail, and fairly fawned upon us as it slipped quickly through the opening, then looked at each of us in turn with great, expressive topaz eyes.

"Ah, mon Dieu," exclaimed the Frenchman, sheathing his weapon and starting forward, "it is Madame Sarah!"

"Sallie?" cried John Maxwell incredulously, and at his voice the beast leaped toward him, rubbed against his knees, then rose upon its hind feet and strove to lick his face.

"Ohé, quel dommage!" de Grandin looked at them with tear-filled eyes; then:

"Your pardon, Madame Sarah, but I do not think you came to us without a reason. Can you lead us to the place where he abides? If so we promise you shall be avenged within the hour."

The silver wolf dropped to all fours again, and nodded its sleek head in answer to his question; then, as he hesitated, came slowly up to him, took the

cuff of his evening coat gently in its teeth and drew him toward the door.

"*Bravo, ma chère,* lead on, we follow!" he exclaimed; then, as we donned our coats, he thrust a pistol in my hand and cautioned: "Watch well, my friend, she seems all amiable, but wolves are treacherous, man-wolves a thousand times more so; it may be he has sent her to lead us to a trap. Should anything untoward transpire, shoot first and ask your foolish questions afterward. That way you shall increase your chances of dying peacefully in bed."

THE white beast trotting before us, we hastened down the quiet, moonlit street. After forty minutes' rapid walk, we stopped before a small apartment house. As we paused to gaze, the little wolf once more seized Jules de Grandin's sleeve between her teeth and drew him forward.

It was a little house, only three floors high, and its front was zigzagged with iron fire escapes. No lights burned in any of the flats, and the whole place had an air of vacancy, but our lupine guide led us through the entranceway and down the ground floor hall until we paused before the door of a rear apartment.

De Grandin tried the knob cautiously, found the lock made fast, and after a moment dropped to his knees, drew out a ringful of fine steel instruments and began picking the fastening as methodically as though he were a professional burglar. The lock was "burglar-proof" but its makers had not reckoned with the skill of Jules de Grandin. Before five minutes had elapsed he rose with a pleased exclamation, turned the knob and thrust the door back.

"Hold her, Friend Jean," he bade John Maxwell, for the wolf was trembling with a nervous quiver, and straining to rush into the apartment. To me he added: "Have your gun ready, good Friend Trowbridge, and keep by me. He shall not take us unawares."

Shoulder to shoulder we entered the dark doorway of the flat, John Maxwell and the wolf behind us. For a moment we paused while de Grandin felt along the wall, then *click;* the snapping of a wall-switch sounded, and the dark room blazed with sudden light.

The wolf-man's human hours were passed in pleasant circumstances. Every item of the room proclaimed it the abode of one whose wealth and tastes were well matched. The walls were hung with light gray paper, the floor was covered with a Persian rug, and wide, low chairs upholstered in long-napped mohair invited the visitor to rest. Beneath the arch of a marble mantelpiece a wood fire had been laid, ready for the match, while upon the shelf a tiny French-gilt clock beat off the minutes with sharp, musical clicks. Pictures in profusion lined the walls, a landscape by an apt pupil of Corot, an excellent imitation of Botticelli, and, above the mantel, a single life-sized portrait done in oils.

Every item of the portrait was portrayed with photographic fidelity, and we looked with interest at the subject, a man in early middle life, or late youth, dressed in the uniform of a captain of Greek cavalry. His cloak was thrown back from his braided shoulders, displaying several military decorations, but it was the face which captured the attention instantly, making all the added detail of no consequence. The hair was light, worn rather long, and brushed straight back from a high, wide forehead. The eyes were blue, and touched with an expression of gentle melancholy. The features were markedly Oriental in cast, but neither coarse nor sensual. In vivid contrast to

the hair and eyes was the pointed beard upon the chin; for it was black as coal, yet by some quaint combination of the artist's pigments it seemed to hide blue lights within its sable depths. Looking from the blue-black beard to the sad blue eyes it seemed to me I saw a hint, the merest faint suggestion, of wolfish cruelty in the face.

"It is undoubtlessly he," de Grandin murmured as he gazed upon the portrait. "He fits poor Madame Sarah's description to a nicety. But where is he in person? We can not fight his picture; no, of course not."

Motioning us to wait, he snapped the light off and drew a pocket flashlight from his waistcoat. He tiptoed through the door, exploring the farther room by the beam of his searchlight, then rejoined us with a gesture of negation.

"He is not here," he announced softly; "but come with me, my friends, I would show you something."

He led the way to the adjoining chamber, which, in any other dwelling, would have been the bedroom. It was bare, utterly unfurnished, and as he flashed his light around the walls we saw, some three or four feet from the floor, a row of paw-prints, as though a beast had stood upon its hind legs and pressed its forefeet to the walls. And the prints were marked in reddish smears—blood.

"You see?" he asked, as though the answer to his question were apparent. "He has no bed; he needs none, for at night he is a wolf, and sleeps denned down upon the floor. Also, you observe, he has not lacked for provender—*le bon Dieu* grant it was the blood of animals that stained his claws!"

"But where is he?" asked Maxwell, fingering his pistol.

"S-s-sh!" warned the Frenchman. "I do not think that he is far away. The window, you observe her?"

"Well?"

"Précisément. She is a scant four feet from the ground, and overlooks the alley. Also, though she was once fitted with bars, they have been removed. Also, again, the sash is ready-raised. Is it not all perfect?"

"Perfect? For what?"

"For him, *parbleu!* For the werewolf's entrances and exits. He comes running down the alley, leaps agilely through the open window, and *voilà,* he is here. Or leaps out into the alleyway with a single bound, and goes upon his nightly hunts. He may return at any moment; it is well that we await him here."

THE waiting minutes stretched interminably. The dark room where we crouched was lighted from time to time, then cast again into shadow, as the racing clouds obscured or unveiled the full moon's visage. At length, when I felt I could no longer stand the strain, a low, harsh growl from our four-footed companion brought us sharply to attention. In another moment we heard the soft patter-patter, scratch-scratch of a long-clawed beast running lightly on the pavement of the alleyway outside, and in a second more a dark form bulked against the window's opening and something landed upon the floor.

For a moment there was breathless silence; then: *"Bon soir, Monsieur Loup-garou,"* de Grandin greeted in a pleasant voice. "You have unexpected visitors.

"Do not move," he added threateningly as a hardly audible growl sounded from the farther corner of the room and we heard the scraping of long nails upon the floor as the wolf-thing gathered for a spring; "there are three of us, and each

one is armed. Your reign of terror draws to a close, *Monsieur.*"

A narrow, dazzling shaft of light shot from his pocket torch, clove through the gloom and picked the crouching wolf-thing's form out of the darkness. Fangs bared, black lips drawn back in bestial fury, the gaunt, gray thing was backed into the corner, and from its open jaws we saw a thin trickle of slabber mixed with blood. It had been feeding, so much was obvious. "But what had been its food?" I wondered with a shudder.

"It is your shot, Friend Jean," the little Frenchman spoke. "Take careful aim, and do not jerk the pistol when you fire." He held his flashlight steadily upon the beast, and a second later came the roar of Maxwell's pistol.

The acrid smoke stung in our nostrils, the reverberation of the detonation almost deafened us, and—a little fleck of plaster fell down from the wall where Maxwell's bullet was harmlessly embedded.

"Ten thousand stinking camels!" Jules de Grandin cried, but got no further, for with a maddened, murderous growl the wolf-man sprang, his lithe body describing a graceful arc as it hurtled through the air, his cruel, white fangs flashing terribly as he leaped upon John Maxwell and bore him to the floor before he could fire a second shot.

"*Nom de Dieu de nom de Dieu de nom de Dieu!*" de Grandin swore, playing his flashlight upon the struggling man and brute and leaping forward, seeking for a chance to use his pistol.

But to shoot the wolf would have meant that he must shoot the man, as well; for the furry body lay upon the struggling Maxwell, and as they thrashed and wrestled on the floor it was impossible to tell, at times, in the uncertain light, which one was man and which was beast.

Then came a deep, low growl of pent-up, savage fury, almost an articulate curse, it seemed to me, and like a streak of silver-plated vengeance the little she-wolf leaped upon the gray-brown brute which growled and worried at the young man's throat.

We saw the white teeth bared, we saw them flesh themselves in the wolf-thing's shoulder, we saw her loose her hold, and leap back, avoiding the great wolf's counter-stroke, then close with it again, sinking needle-fangs in the furry ruff about its throat.

The great wolf shook her to and fro, battered her against the walls and floor as a vicious terrier mistreats a luckless rat, but she held on savagely, though we saw her left forepaw go limp and knew the bone was broken.

De Grandin watched his chance, crept closer, closer, till he almost straddled the contending beasts; then, darting forth his hand he put his pistol to the tawny-gray wolf's ear, squeezed the trigger and leaped back.

A wild, despairing wail went up, the great, gray form seemed suddenly to stiffen, to grow longer, heavier, to shed its fur and thicken in limbs and body-structure. In a moment, as we watched the horrid transformation, we beheld a human form stretched out upon the floor; the body of a handsome man with fair hair and black beard, at the throat of which a slender silver-gray she-wolf was worrying.

"It is over, finished, little brave one," de Grandin announced, reaching out a hand to stroke the little wolf's pale fur. "Right nobly have you borne yourself this night; but we have much to do before our work is finished."

The she-wolf backed away, but the

hair upon her shoulders was still bristling, and her topaz eyes were jewel-bright with the light of combat. Once or twice, despite de Grandin's hand upon her neck, she gave vent to throaty growls and started toward the still form which lay upon the floor in a pool of moonlight, another pool fast gathering beneath its head where de Grandin's bullet had crashed through its skull and brain.

John Maxwell moved and moaned a tortured moan, and instantly the little wolf was by his side, licking his cheeks with her pink tongue, emitting little pleading whines, almost like the whimpers of a child in pain.

When Maxwell regained consciousness it was pathetic to see the joy the wolf showed as he sat up and feebly put a groping hand against his throat.

"Not dead, my friend, you are not nearly dead, thanks to the bravery of your noble lady," de Grandin told him with a laugh. Then, to me:

"Do you go home with them, Friend Trowbridge. I must remain to dispose of this"—he prodded the inert form with his foot—"and will be with you shortly.

"Be of good cheer, *ma pauvre,*" he told the she-wolf, "you shall be soon released from the spell which binds you; I swear it; though never need you be ashamed of what you did this night, whatever form you might have had while doing it."

JOHN MAXWELL sat upon the divan, head in hands, the wolf crouched at his feet, her broken paw dangling pitifully, her topaz eyes intent upon his face. I paced restlessly before the fire. De Grandin had declared he knew how to release her from the spell—but what if he should fail? I shuddered at the thought. What booted it that we had killed the man-wolf if Sarah must be bound in wolfish form henceforth?

"*Tiens,* my friends," de Grandin announced himself at the library door, "he took a lot of disposing of, that one. First I had to clean the blood from off his bedroom floor, then I must lug his filthy carcass out into the alley and dispose of it as though it had been flung there from a racing motor. Tomorrow I doubt not the papers will make much of the mysterious murder. 'A gangster put upon the spot by other gangsters,' they will say. And shall we point out their mistake? I damn think no."

He paused with a self-satisfied chuckle; then: "Friend Jean, will you be good enough to go and fetch a negligée for Madame Sarah?" he asked. "Hurry, *mon vieux,* she will have need of it anon."

As the young man left us: "Quick, my friends," he ordered. "You, Madame Sarah, lie upon the floor before the fire, thus. *Bien.*

"Friend Trowbridge, prepare bandages and splints for her poor arm. We can not set it now, but later we must do so. Certainly.

"Now, my little brave one," he addressed the wolf again, "this will hurt you sorely, but only for a moment."

Drawing a small flask from his pocket he pulled the cork and poured its contents over her.

"It's holy water," he explained as she whined and shivered as the liquid soaked into her fur. "I had to stop to steal it from a church."

A knife gleamed in the firelight, and he drove the gleaming blade into her head, drew it forth and shook it toward the fire, so that a drop of blood fell hissing in the leaping flames. Twice more he cut her with the knife, and twice more dropped her blood into the fire; then, holding the knife lightly by the handle,

he struck her with the flat of the blade between the ears three times in quick succession, crying as he did so: "Sarah Maxwell, I command that you once more assume your native form in the name of the Most Holy Trinity!"

A shudder passed through the wolf's frame. From nose to tail-tip she trembled, as though she lay in her death-agony; then suddenly her outlines seemed to blur. Pale fur gave way to paler flesh, her dainty lupine paws became dainty human hands and feet, her body was no more that of a wolf, but of a soft, sweet woman.

But life seemed to have gone from her. She lay flaccid on the hearth rug, her mouth a little open, eyes closed, no movement of her breast perceptible. I looked at her with growing consternation, but:

"Quickly, my friends, the splints, the bandages!" de Grandin ordered.

I set the broken arm as quickly as I could, and as I finished young John Maxwell rushed into the room.

"Sallie, beloved!" he fell beside his wife's unconscious form, tears streaming down his face.

"Is she—is she——" he began, but could not force himself to finish, as he looked imploringly at Jules de Grandin.

"Dead?" the little man supplied. "By no means; not at all, my friend. She is alive and healthy. A broken arm mends quickly, and she has youth and stamina. Put on her robe and bear her up to bed. She will do excellently when she has had some sleep.

"But first observe this, if you please," he added, pointing to her side. Where the cicatrix with its tuft of wolf-hair had marred her skin, there was now only smooth, unspotted flesh. "The curse is wholly lifted," he declared delightedly. "You need no more regard it, except as an unpleasant memory."

"John dear," we heard the young wife murmur as her husband bore her from the room, "I've had such a terrible dream. I dreamed that I'd been turned into a wolf, and——"

"Come quickly, good Friend Trowbridge," de Grandin plucked me by the arm. "I, too, would dream."

"Dream? Of what?" I asked him.

"Perchance of youth and love and springtime, and the joys that might have been," he answered, something like a tremble in his voice. "And then, again, perchance of snakes and toads and elephants, all of most unauthentic color—such things as one may see when he has drunk himself into the blissful state of delirium tremens. I do not surely know that I can drink that much, but may the Devil bake me if I do not try!"

A strange, blood-freezing story of an idol that wept on its throne, and a valiant barbarian from the fringes of an elder civilization

"Conan set his teeth and drove the sword deep."

The Tower of the Elephant

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

TORCHES flared murkily on the revels in the Maul, where the thieves of the east held carnival by night. In the Maul they could carouse and roar as they liked, for honest people shunned the quarters, and watchmen, well paid with stained coins, did not interfere with their sport. Along the crooked, unpaved streets with their heaps of refuse and sloppy puddles, drunken roisterers staggered, roaring. Steel glinted in the shadows where wolf preyed on wolf, and from the darkness rose the shrill laughter of women, and the sounds of scufflings and strugglings. Torchlight licked luridly from broken windows and wide-thrown doors, and out of those doors, stale smells of wine and rank sweaty bodies, clamor of drinking-jacks and fists hammered on rough tables, snatches of ob-

scene songs, rushed like a blow in the face.

In one of these dens merriment thundered to the low smoke-stained roof, where rascals gathered in every stage of rags and tatters—furtive cut-purses, leering kidnappers, quick-fingered thieves, swaggering bravoes with their wenches, strident-voiced women clad in tawdry finery. Native rogues were the dominant element — dark-skinned, dark-eyed Zamorians, with daggers at their girdles and guile in their hearts. But there were wolves of half a dozen outland nations there as well. There was a giant Hyperborean renegade, taciturn, dangerous, with a broadsword strapped to his great gaunt frame—for men wore steel openly in the Maul. There was a Shemitish counterfeiter, with his hook nose and curled blue-black beard. There was a bold-eyed Brythunian wench, sitting on the knee of a tawny-haired Gunderman—a wandering mercenary soldier, a deserter from some defeated army. And the fat gross rogue whose bawdy jests were causing all the shouts of mirth was a professional kidnapper come up from distant Koth to teach woman-stealing to Zamorians who were born with more knowledge of the art than he could ever attain.

This man halted in his description of an intended victim's charms, and thrust his muzzle into a huge tankard of frothing ale. Then blowing the foam from his fat lips, he said, "By Bel, god of all thieves, I'll show them how to steal wenches: I'll have her over the Zamorian border before dawn, and there'll be a caravan waiting to receive her. Three hundred pieces of silver, a count of Ophir promised me for a sleek young Brythunian of the better class. It took me weeks, wandering among the border cities as a beggar, to find one I knew would suit. And is she a pretty baggage!"

He blew a slobbery kiss in the air.

"I know lords in Shem who would trade the secret of the Elephant Tower for her," he said, returning to his ale.

A TOUCH on his tunic sleeve made him turn his head, scowling at the interruption. He saw a tall, strongly made youth standing beside him. This person was as much out of place in that den as a gray wolf among mangy rats of the gutters. His cheap tunic could not conceal the hard, rangy lines of his powerful frame, the broad heavy shoulders, the massive chest, lean waist, and heavy arms. His skin was brown from outland suns, his eyes blue and smoldering; a shock of tousled black hair crowned his broad forehead. From his girdle hung a sword in a worn leather scabbard.

The Kothian involuntarily drew back; for the man was not one of any civilized race he knew.

"You spoke of the Elephant Tower," said the stranger, speaking Zamorian with an alien accent. "I've heard much of this tower; what is its secret?"

The fellow's attitude did not seem threatening, and the Kothian's courage was bolstered up by the ale, and the evident approval of his audience. He swelled with self-importance.

"The secret of the Elephant Tower?" he exclaimed. "Why, any fool knows that Yara the priest dwells there with the great jewel men call the Elephant's Heart, that is the secret of his magic."

The barbarian digested this for a space.

"I have seen this tower," he said. "It is set in a great garden above the level of the city, surrounded by high walls. I have seen no guards. The walls would be easy to climb. Why has not somebody stolen this secret gem?"

The Kothian stared wide-mouthed at the other's simplicity, then burst into a

roar of derisive mirth, in which the others joined.

"Harken to this heathen!" he bellowed. "He would steal the jewel of Yara!—Harken, fellow," he said, turning portentously to the other, "I suppose you are some sort of a northern barbarian——"

"I am a Cimmerian," the outlander answered, in no friendly tone. The reply and the manner of it meant little to the Kothian; of a kingdom that lay far to the south, on the borders of Shem, he knew only vaguely of the northern races.

"Then give ear and learn wisdom, fellow," said he, pointing his drinking-jack at the discomfited youth. "Know that in Zamora, and more especially in this city, there are more bold thieves than anywhere else in the world, even Koth. If mortal man could have stolen the gem, be sure it would have been filched long ago. You speak of climbing the walls, but once having climbed, you would quickly wish yourself back again. There are no guards in the gardens at night for a very good reason—that is, no human guards. But in the watch-chamber, in the lower part of the tower, are armed men, and even if you passed those who roam the gardens by night, you must still pass through the soldiers, for the gem is kept somewhere in the tower above."

"But if a man *could* pass through the gardens," argued the Cimmerian, "why could he not come at the gem through the upper part of the tower and thus avoid the soldiers?"

Again the Kothian gaped at him.

"Listen to him!" he shouted jeeringly. "The barbarian is an eagle who would fly to the jeweled rim of the tower, which is only a hundred and fifty feet above the earth, with rounded sides slicker than polished glass!"

The Cimmerian glared about, embarrassed at the roar of mocking laughter that greeted this remark. He saw no particular humor in it, and was too new to civilization to understand its discourtesies. Civilized men are more discourteous than savages because they know they can be impolite without having their skulls split, as a general thing. He was bewildered and chagrined, and doubtless would have slunk away, abashed, but the Kothian chose to goad him further.

"Come, come!" he shouted. "Tell these poor fellows, who have only been thieves since before you were spawned, tell them how you would steal the gem!"

"There is always a way, if the desire be coupled with courage," answered the Cimmerian shortly, nettled.

The Kothian chose to take this as a personal slur. His face grew purple with anger.

"What!" he roared. "You dare tell us our business, and intimate that we are cowards? Get along; get out of my sight!" And he pushed the Cimmerian violently.

"Will you mock me and then lay hands on me?" grated the barbarian, his quick rage leaping up; and he returned the push with an open-handed blow that knocked his tormenter back against the rude-hewn table. Ale splashed over the jack's lip, and the Kothian roared in fury, dragging at his sword.

"Heathen dog!" he bellowed. "I'll have your heart for that!"

Steel flashed and the throng surged wildly back out of the way. In their flight they knocked over the single candle and the den was plunged in darkness, broken by the crash of upset benches, drum of flying feet, shouts, oaths of people tumbling over one another, and a single strident yell of agony that cut the din like a knife. When a candle was relighted, most of the guests had gone out by doors and broken windows, and the rest hud-

dled behind stacks of wine-kegs and under tables. The barbarian was gone; the center of the room was deserted except for the gashed body of the Kothian. The Cimmerian, with the unerring instinct of the barbarian, had killed his man in the darkness and confusion.

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THE lurid lights and drunken revelry fell away behind the Cimmerian. He had discarded his torn tunic, and walked through the night naked except for a loincloth and his high-strapped sandals. He moved with the supple ease of a great tiger, his steely muscles rippling under his brown skin.

He had entered the part of the city reserved for the temples. On all sides of him they glittered white in the starlight—snowy marble pillars and golden domes and silver arches, shrines of Zamora's myriad strange gods. He did not trouble his head about them; he knew that Zamora's religion, like all things of a civilized, long-settled people, was intricate and complex, and had lost most of the pristine essence in a maze of formulas and rituals. He had squatted for hours in the courtyards of the philosophers, listening to the arguments of theologians and teachers, and come away in a haze of bewilderment, sure of only one thing, and that, that they were all touched in the head.

His gods were simple and understandable; Crom was their chief, and he lived on a great mountain, whence he sent forth dooms and death. It was useless to call on Crom, because he was a gloomy, savage god, and he hated weaklings. But he gave a man courage at birth, and the will and might to kill his enemies, which, in the Cimmerian's mind, was all any god should be expected to do.

His sandalled feet made no sound on the gleaming pave. No watchmen passed, for even the thieves of the Maul shunned the temples, where strange dooms had been known to fall on violators. Ahead of him he saw, looming against the sky, the Tower of the Elephant. He mused, wondering why it was so named. No one seemed to know. He had never seen an elephant, but he vaguely understood that it was a monstrous animal, with a tail in front as well as behind. This a wandering Shemite had told him, swearing that he had seen such beasts by the thousands in the country of the Hyrkanians; but all men knew what liars were the men of Shem. At any rate, there were no elephants in Zamora.

The shimmering shaft of the tower rose frostily in the stars. In the sunlight it shone so dazzlingly that few could bear its glare, and men said it was built of silver. It was round, a slim perfect cylinder, a hundred and fifty feet in height, and its rim glittered in the starlight with the great jewels which crusted it. The tower stood among the waving exotic trees of a garden raised high above the general level of the city. A high wall enclosed this garden, and outside the wall was a lower level, likewise enclosed by a wall. No lights shone forth; there seemed to be no windows in the tower—at least not above the level of the inner wall. Only the gems high above sparkled frostily in the starlight.

Shrubbery grew thick outside the lower, or outer wall. The Cimmerian crept close and stood beside the barrier, measuring it with his eye. It was high, but he could leap and catch the coping with his fingers. Then it would be child's play to swing himself up and over, and he did not doubt that he could pass the inner wall in the same manner. But he hesitated at the thought of the strange perils which were

said to await within. These people were strange and mysterious to him; they were not of his kind—not even of the same blood as the more westerly Brythunians, Nemedians, Kothians and Aquilonians, whose civilized mysteries had awed him in times past. The people of Zamora were very ancient, and, from what he had seen of them, very evil.

He thought of Yara, the high priest, who worked strange dooms from this jeweled tower, and the Cimmerian's hair prickled as he remembered a tale told by a drunken page of the court—how Yara had laughed in the face of a hostile prince, and held up a glowing, evil gem before him, and how rays shot blindingly from that unholy jewel, to envelop the prince, who screamed and fell down, and shrank to a withered blackened lump that changed to a black spider which scampered wildly about the chamber until Yara set his heel upon it.

Yara came not often from his tower of magic, and always to work evil on some man or some nation. The king of Zamora feared him more than he feared death, and kept himself drunk all the time because that fear was more than he could endure sober. Yara was very old —centuries old, men said, and added that he would live for ever because of the magic of his gem, which men called the Heart of the Elephant, for no better reason than they named his hold the Elephant's Tower.

The Cimmerian, engrossed in these thoughts, shrank quickly against the wall. Within the garden some one was passing, who walked with a measured stride. The listener heard the clink of steel. So after all a guard did pace those gardens. The Cimmerian waited, expected to hear him pass again, on the next round, but silence rested over the mysterious gardens.

At last curiosity overcame him. Leaping lightly he grasped the wall and swung himself up to the top with one arm. Lying flat on the broad coping, he looked down into the wide space between the walls. No shrubbery grew near him, though he saw some carefully trimmed bushes near the inner wall. The starlight fell on the even sward and somewhere a fountain tinkled.

The Cimmerian cautiously lowered himself down on the inside and drew his sword, staring about him. He was shaken by the nervousness of the wild at standing thus unprotected in the naked starlight, and he moved lightly around the curve of the wall, hugging its shadow, until he was even with the shrubbery he had noticed. Then he ran quickly toward it, crouching low, and almost tripped over a form that lay crumpled near the edges of the bushes.

A quick look to right and left showed him no enemy in sight at least, and he bent close to investigate. His keen eyes, even in the dim starlight, showed him a strongly built man in the silvered armor and crested helmet of the Zamorian royal guard. A shield and a spear lay near him, and it took but an instant's examination to show that he had been strangled. The barbarian glanced about uneasily. He knew that this man must be the guard he had heard pass his hiding-place by the wall. Only a short time had passed, yet in that interval nameless hands had reached out of the dark and choked out the soldier's life.

STRAINING his eyes in the gloom, he saw a hint of motion through the shrubs near the wall. Thither he glided, gripping his sword. He made no more noise than a panther stealing through the night, yet the man he was stalking heard. The Cimmerian had a dim glimpse of a

huge bulk close to the wall, felt relief that it was at least human; then the fellow wheeled quickly with a gasp that sounded like panic, made the first motion of a forward plunge, hands clutching, then recoiled as the Cimmerian's blade caught the starlight. For a tense instant neither spoke, standing ready for anything.

"You are no soldier," hissed the stranger at last. "You are a thief like myself."

"And who are you?" asked the Cimmerian in a suspicious whisper.

"Taurus of Nemedia."

The Cimmerian lowered his sword.

"I've heard of you. Men call you a prince of thieves."

A low laugh answered him. Taurus was tall as the Cimmerian, and heavier; he was big-bellied and fat, but his every movement betokened a subtle dynamic magnetism, which was reflected in the keen eyes that glinted vitally, even in the starlight. He was barefooted and carried a coil of what looked like a thin, strong rope, knotted at regular intervals.

"Who are you?" he whispered.

"Conan, a Cimmerian," answered the other. "I came seeking a way to steal Yara's jewel, that men call the Elephant's Heart."

Conan sensed the man's great belly shaking in laughter, but it was not derisive.

"By Bel, god of thieves!" hissed Taurus. "I had thought only myself had courage to attempt *that* poaching. These Zamorians call themselves thieves—bah! Conan, I like your grit. I never shared an adventure with any one, but by Bel, we'll attempt this together if you're willing."

"Then you are after the gem, too?"

"What else? I've had my plans laid for months, but you, I think, have acted on a sudden impulse, my friend."

"You killed the soldier?"

"Of course. I slid over the wall when he was on the other side of the garden. I hid in the bushes; he heard me, or thought he heard something. When he came blundering over, it was no trick at all to get behind him and suddenly grip his neck and choke out his fool's life. He was like most men, half blind in the dark. A good thief should have eyes like a cat."

"You made one mistake," said Conan.

Taurus' eyes flashed angrily.

"I? I, a mistake? Impossible!"

"You should have dragged the body into the bushes."

"Said the novice to the master of the art. They will not change the guard until past midnight. Should any come searching for him now, and find his body, they would flee at once to Yara, bellowing the news, and give us time to escape. Were they not to find it, they'd go beating up the bushes and catch us like rats in a trap."

"You are right," agreed Conan.

"So. Now attend. We waste time in this cursed discussion. There are no guards in the inner garden—human guards, I mean, though there are sentinels even more deadly. It was their presence which baffled me for so long, but I finally discovered a way to circumvent them."

"What of the soldiers in the lower part of the tower?"

"Old Yara dwells in the chambers above. By that route we will come—and go, I hope. Never mind asking me how. I have arranged a way. We'll steal down through the top of the tower and strangle old Yara before he can cast any of his accursed spells on us. At least we'll try; it's the chance of being turned into a spider or a toad, against the wealth and

power of the world. All good thieves must know how to take risks."

"I'll go as far as any man," said Conan, slipping off his sandals.

"Then follow me." And turning, Taurus leaped up, caught the wall and drew himself up. The man's suppleness was amazing, considering his bulk; he seemed almost to glide up over the edge of the coping. Conan followed him, and lying flat on the broad top, they spoke in wary whispers.

"I see no light," Conan muttered. The lower part of the tower seemed much like that portion visible from outside the garden—a perfect, gleaming cylinder, with no apparent openings.

"There are cleverly constructed doors and windows," answered Taurus, "but they are closed. The soldiers breathe air that comes from above."

The garden was a vague pool of shadows, where feathery bushes and low spreading trees waved darkly in the starlight. Conan's wary soul felt the aura of waiting menace that brooded over it. He felt the burning glare of unseen eyes, and he caught a subtle scent that made the short hairs on his neck instinctively bristle as a hunting dog bristles at the scent of an ancient enemy.

"Follow me," whispered Taurus, "keep behind me, as you value your life."

TAKING what looked like a copper tube from his girdle, the Nemedian dropped lightly to the sward inside the wall. Conan was close behind him, sword ready, but Taurus pushed him back, close to the wall, and showed no inclination to advance, himself. His whole attitude was of tense expectancy, and his gaze, like Conan's, was fixed on the shadowy mass of shrubbery a few yards away. This shrubbery was shaken, although the breeze had died down. Then two great eyes blazed from the waving shadows, and behind them other sparks of fire glinted in the darkness.

"Lions!" muttered Conan.

"Aye. By day they are kept in subterranean caverns below the tower. That's why there are no guards in this garden."

Conan counted the eyes rapidly.

"Five in sight; maybe more back in the bushes. They'll charge in a moment——"

"Be silent!" hissed Taurus, and he moved out from the wall, cautiously as if treading on razors, lifting the slender tube. Low rumblings rose from the shadows and the blazing eyes moved forward. Conan could sense the great slavering jaws, the tufted tails lashing tawny sides. The air grew tense—the Cimmerian gripped his sword, expecting the charge and the irresistible hurtling of giant bodies. Then Taurus brought the mouth of the tube to his lips and blew powerfully. A long jet of yellowish powder shot from the other end of the tube and billowed out instantly in a thick green-yellow cloud that settled over the shrubbery, blotting out the glaring eyes.

Taurus ran back hastily to the wall. Conan glared without understanding. The thick cloud hid the shrubbery, and from it no sound came.

"What is that mist?" the Cimmerian asked uneasily.

"Death!" hissed the Nemedian. "If a wind springs up and blows it back upon us, we must flee over the wall. But no, the wind is still, and now it is dissipating. Wait until it vanishes entirely. To breathe it is death."

Presently only yellowish shreds hung ghostlily in the air; then they were gone, and Taurus motioned his companion forward. They stole toward the bushes, and Conan gasped. Stretched out in the shadows lay five great tawny shapes, the fire

of their grim eyes dimmed for ever. A sweetish cloying scent lingered in the atmosphere.

"They died without a sound!" muttered the Cimmerian. "Taurus, what was that powder?"

"It was made from the black lotus, whose blossoms wave in the lost jungles of Khitai, where only the yellow-skulled priests of Yun dwell. Those blossoms strike dead any who smell of them."

Conan knelt beside the great forms, assuring himself that they were indeed beyond power of harm. He shook his head; the magic of the exotic lands was mysterious and terrible to the barbarians of the north.

"Why can you not slay the soldiers in the tower in the same way?" he asked.

"Because that was all the powder I possessed. The obtaining of it was a feat which in itself was enough to make me famous among the thieves of the world. I stole it out of a caravan bound for Stygia, and I lifted it, in its cloth-of-gold bag, out of the coils of the great serpent which guarded it, without awaking him. But come, in Bel's name! Are we to waste the night in discussion?"

They glided through the shrubbery to the gleaming foot of the tower, and there, with a motion enjoining silence, Taurus unwound his knotted cord, on one end of which was a strong steel hook. Conan saw his plan, and asked no questions as the Nemedian gripped the line a short distance below the hook, and began to swing it about his head. Conan laid his ear to the smooth wall and listened, but could hear nothing. Evidently the soldiers within did not suspect the presence of intruders, who had made no more sound than the night wind blowing through the trees. But a strange nervousness was on the barbarian; perhaps it was the lion-smell which was over everything.

TAURUS threw the line with a smooth, ripping motion of his mighty arm. The hook curved upward and inward in a peculiar manner, hard to describe, and vanished over the jeweled rim. It apparently caught firmly, for cautious jerking and then hard pulling did not result in any slipping or giving.

"Luck the first cast," murmured Taurus. "I——"

It was Conan's savage instinct which made him wheel suddenly; for the death that was upon them made no sound. A fleeting glimpse showed the Cimmerian the giant tawny shape, rearing upright against the stars, towering over him for the death-stroke. No civilized man could have moved half so quickly as the barbarian moved. His sword flashed frostily in the starlight with every ounce of desperate nerve and thew behind it, and man and beast went down together.

Cursing incoherently beneath his breath, Taurus bent above the mass, and saw his companion's limbs move as he strove to drag himself from under the great weight that lay limply upon him. A glance showed the startled Nemedian that the lion was dead, its slanting skull split in half. He laid hold of the carcass, and by his aid, Conan thrust it aside and clambered up, still gripping his dripping sword.

"Are you hurt, man?" gasped Taurus, still bewildered by the stunning swiftness of that touch-and-go episode.

"No, by Crom!" answered the barbarian. "But that was as close a call as I've had in a life noways tame. Why did not the cursed beast roar as he charged?"

"All things are strange in this garden," said Taurus. "The lions strike silently—and so do other deaths. But come—little sound was made in that slaying, but the soldiers might have heard, if they are not asleep or drunk. That beast was in some other part of the

garden and escaped the death of the flowers, but surely there are no more. We must climb this cord—little need to ask a Cimmerian if he can."

"If it will bear my weight," grunted Conan, cleansing his sword on the grass.

"It will bear thrice my own," answered Taurus. "It was woven from the tresses of dead women, which I took from their tombs at midnight, and steeped in the deadly wine of the upas tree, to give it strength. I will go first—then follow me closely."

The Nemedian gripped the rope and crooking a knee about it, began the ascent; he went up like a cat, belying the apparent clumsiness of his bulk. The Cimmerian followed. The cord swayed and turned on itself, but the climbers were not hindered; both had made more difficult climbs before. The jeweled rim glittered high above them, jutting out from the perpendicular of the wall, so that the cord hung perhaps a foot from the side of the tower—a fact which added greatly to the ease of the ascent.

Up and up they went, silently, the lights of the city spreading out further and further to their sight as they climbed, the stars above them more and more dimmed by the glitter of the jewels along the rim. Now Taurus reached up a hand and gripped the rim itself, pulling himself up and over. Conan paused a moment on the very edge, fascinated by the great frosty jewels whose gleams dazzled his eyes—diamonds, rubies, emeralds, sapphires, turquoises, moonstones, set thick as stars in the shimmering silver. At a distance their different gleams had seemed to merge into a pulsing white glare; but now, at close range, they shimmered with a million rainbow tints and lights, hypnotizing him with their scintillations.

"There is a fabulous fortune here, Taurus," he whispered; but the Nemedian answered impatiently, "Come on! If we secure the Heart, these and all other things shall be ours."

Conan climbed over the sparkling rim. The level of the tower's top was some feet below the gemmed ledge. It was flat, composed of some dark blue substance, set with gold that caught the starlight, so that the whole looked like a wide sapphire flecked with shining gold-dust. Across from the point where they had entered there seemed to be a sort of chamber, built upon the roof. It was of the same silvery material as the walls of the tower, adorned with designs worked in smaller gems; its single door was of gold, its surface cut in scales, and crusted with jewels that gleamed like ice.

Conan cast a glance at the pulsing ocean of lights which spread far below them, then glanced at Taurus. The Nemedian was drawing up his cord and coiling it. He showed Conan where the hook had caught—a fraction of an inch of the point had sunk under a great blazing jewel on the inner side of the rim.

"Luck was with us again," he muttered. "One would think that our combined weight would have torn that stone out. Follow me; the real risks of the venture begin now. We are in the serpent's lair, and we know not where he lies hidden."

Like stalking tigers they crept across the darkly gleaming floor and halted outside the sparkling door. With a deft and cautious hand Taurus tried it. It gave without resistance, and the companions looked in, tensed for anything. Over the Nemedian's shoulder Conan had a glimpse of a glittering chamber, the walls, ceiling and floor of which were crusted with great white jewels which lighted it brightly,

and which seemed its only illumination. It seemed empty of life.

"Before we cut off our last retreat," hissed Taurus, "go you to the rim and look over on all sides; if you see any soldiers moving in the gardens, or anything suspicious, return and tell me. I will await you within this chamber."

Conan saw scant reason in this, and a faint suspicion of his companion touched his wary soul, but he did as Taurus requested. As he turned away, the Nemedian slipt inside the door and drew it shut behind him. Conan crept about the rim of the tower, returning to his starting-point without having seen any suspicious movement in the vaguely waving sea of leaves below. He turned toward the door —suddenly from within the chamber there sounded a strangled cry.

The Cimmerian leaped forward, electrified—the gleaming door swung open and Taurus stood framed in the cold blaze behind him. He swayed and his lips parted, but only a dry rattle burst from his throat. Catching at the golden door for support, he lurched out upon the roof, then fell headlong, clutching at his throat. The door swung to behind him.

Conan, crouching like a panther at bay, saw nothing in the room behind the stricken Nemedian, in the brief instant the door was partly open—unless it was not a trick of the light which made it seem as if a shadow darted across the gleaming floor. Nothing followed Taurus out on the roof, and Conan bent above the man.

The Nemedian stared up with dilated, glazing eyes, that somehow held a terrible bewilderment. His hands clawed at his throat, his lips slobbered and gurgled; then suddenly he stiffened, and the astounded Cimmerian knew that he was dead. And he felt that Taurus had died without knowing what manner of death had stricken him. Conan glared bewilderedly at the cryptic golden door. In that empty room, with its glittering jeweled walls, death had come to the prince of thieves as swiftly and mysteriously as he had dealt doom to the lions in the gardens below.

Gingerly the barbarian ran his hands over the man's half-naked body, seeking a wound. But the only marks of violence were between his shoulders, high up near the base of his bull-neck—three small wounds, which looked as if three nails had been driven deep in the flesh and withdrawn. The edges of these wounds were black, and a faint smell as of putrefaction was evident. Poisoned darts? thought Conan—but in that case the missiles should be still in the wounds.

Cautiously he stole toward the golden door, pushed it open, and looked inside. The chamber lay empty, bathed in the cold, pulsing glow of the myriad jewels. In the very center of the ceiling he idly noted a curious design—a black eight-sided pattern, in the center of which four gems glittered with a red flame unlike the white blaze of the other jewels. Across the room there was another door, like the one in which he stood, except that it was not carved in the scale pattern. Was it from that door that death had come?—and having struck down its victim, had it retreated by the same way?

CLOSING the door behind him, the Cimmerian advanced into the chamber. His bare feet made no sound on the crystal floor. There were no chairs or tables in the chamber, only three or four silken couches, embroidered with gold and worked in strange serpentine designs, and several silver-bound mahogany chests. Some were sealed with heavy golden locks; others lay open, their carven lids thrown back, revealing heaps of jewels

in a careless riot of splendor to the Cimmerian's astounded eyes. Conan swore beneath his breath; already he had looked upon more wealth that night than he had ever dreamed existed in all the world, and he grew dizzy thinking of what must be the value of the jewel he sought.

He was in the center of the room now, going stooped forward, head thrust out warily, sword advanced, when again death struck at him soundlessly. A flying shadow that swept across the gleaming floor was his only warning, and his instinctive sidelong leap all that saved his life. He had a flashing glimpse of a hairy black horror that swung past him with a clashing of frothing fangs, and something splashed on his bare shoulder that burned like drops of liquid hell-fire. Springing back, sword high, he saw the horror strike the floor, wheel and scuttle toward him with appalling speed—a gigantic black spider, such as men see only in nightmare dreams.

It was as large as a pig, and its eight thick hairy legs drove its ogreish body over the floor at headlong pace; its four evilly gleaming eyes shone with a horrible intelligence, and its fangs dripped venom that Conan knew, from the burning of his shoulder where only a few drops had splashed as the thing struck and missed, was laden with swift death. This was the killer that had dropped from its perch in the middle of the ceiling on a strand of its web, on the neck of the Nemedian. Fools that they were not to have suspected that the upper chambers would be guarded as well as the lower!

These thoughts flashed briefly through Conan's mind as the monster rushed. He leaped high, and it passed beneath him, wheeled and charged back. This time he evaded its rush with a sidewise leap, and struck back like a cat. His sword severed one of the hairy legs, and again he barely saved himself as the monstrosity swerved at him, fangs clicking fiendishly. But the creature did not press the pursuit; turning, it scuttled across the crystal floor and ran up the wall to the ceiling, where it crouched for an instant, glaring down at him with its fiendish red eyes. Then without warning it launched itself through space, trailing a strand of slimy grayish stuff.

Conan stepped back to avoid the hurtling body—then ducked frantically, just in time to escape being snared by the flying web-rope. He saw the monster's intent and sprang toward the door, but it was quicker, and a sticky strand cast across the door made him a prisoner. He dared not try to cut it with his sword; he knew the stuff would cling to the blade, and before he could shake it loose, the fiend would be sinking its fangs into his back.

Then began a desperate game, the wits and quickness of the man matched against the fiendish craft and speed of the giant spider. It no longer scuttled across the floor in a direct charge, or swung its body through the air at him. It raced about the ceiling and the walls, seeking to snare him in the long loops of sticky gray web-strands, which it flung with a devilish accuracy. These strands were thick as ropes, and Conan knew that once they were coiled about him, his desperate strength would not be enough to tear him free before the monster struck.

All over the chamber went on that devil's dance, in utter silence except for the quick breathing of the man, the low scuff of his bare feet on the shining floor, the castanet rattle of the monstrosity's fangs. The gray strands lay in coils on the floor; they were looped along the walls; they overlaid the jewel-chests and silken couches, and hung in dusky festoons from the jeweled ceiling. Conan's

steel-trap quickness of eye and muscle had kept him untouched, though the sticky loops had passed him so close they rasped his naked hide. He knew he could not always avoid them; he not only had to watch the strands swinging from the ceiling, but to keep his eye on the floor, lest he trip in the coils that lay there. Sooner or later a gummy loop would writhe about him, python-like, and then, wrapped like a cocoon, he would lie at the monster's mercy.

The spider raced across the chamber floor, the gray rope waving out behind it. Conan leaped high, clearing a couch—with a quick wheel the fiend ran up the wall, and the strand, leaping off the floor like a live thing, whipped about the Cimmerian's ankle. He caught himself on his hands as he fell, jerking frantically at the web which held him like a pliant vise, or the coil of a python. The hairy devil was racing down the wall to complete its capture. Stung to frenzy, Conan caught up a jewel chest and hurled it with all his strength. It was a move the monster was not expecting. Full in the midst of the branching black legs the massive missile struck, smashing against the wall with a muffled sickening crunch. Blood and greenish slime spattered, and the shattered mass fell with the burst gem-chest to the floor. The crushed black body lay among the flaming riot of jewels that spilled over it; the hairy legs moved aimlessly, the dying eyes glittered redly among the twinkling gems.

Conan glared about, but no other horror appeared, and he set himself to working free of the web. The substance clung tenaciously to his ankle and his hands, but at last he was free, and taking up his sword, he picked his way among the gray coils and loops to the inner door. What horrors lay within he did not know. The Cimmerian's blood was up, and since he had come so far, and overcome so much peril, he was determined to go through to the grim finish of the adventure, whatever that might be. And he felt that the jewel he sought was not among the many so carelessly strewn about the gleaming chamber.

Stripping off the loops that fouled the inner door, he found that it, like the other, was not locked. He wondered if the soldiers below were still unaware of his presence. Well, he was high above their heads, and if tales were to be believed, they were used to strange noises in the tower above them—sinister sounds, and screams of agony and horror.

Yara was on his mind, and he was not altogether comfortable as he opened the golden door. But he saw only a flight of silver steps leading down, dimly lighted by what means he could not ascertain. Down these he went silently, gripping his sword. He heard no sound, and came presently to an ivory door, set with bloodstones. He listened, but no sound came from within; only thin wisps of smoke drifted lazily from beneath the door, bearing a curious exotic odor unfamiliar to the Cimmerian. Below him the silver stair wound down to vanish in the dimness, and up that shadowy well no sound floated; he had an eery feeling that he was alone in a tower occupied only by ghosts and phantoms.

3

CAUTIOUSLY he pressed against the ivory door and it swung silently inward. On the shimmering threshold Conan stared like a wolf in strange surroundings, ready to fight or flee on the instant. He was looking into a large chamber with a domed golden ceiling; the walls were of green jade, the floor of ivory, partly covered by thick rugs. Smoke

and exotic scent of incense floated up from a brazier on a golden tripod, and behind it sat an idol on a sort of marble couch. Conan stared aghast; the image had the body of a man, naked, and green in color; but the head was one of nightmare and madness. Too large for the human body, it had no attributes of humanity. Conan stared at the wide flaring ears, the curling proboscis, on either side of which stood white tusks tipped with round golden balls. The eyes were closed, as if in sleep.

This then, was the reason for the name, the Tower of the Elephant, for the head of the thing was much like that of the beasts described by the Shemitish wanderer. This was Yara's god; where then should the gem be, but concealed in the idol, since the stone was called the Elephant's Heart?

As Conan came forward, his eyes fixed on the motionless idol, the eyes of the thing opened suddenly! The Cimmerian froze in his tracks. It was no image—it was a living thing, and he was trapped in its chamber!

That he did not instantly explode in a burst of murderous frenzy is a fact that measures his horror, which paralyzed him where he stood. A civilized man in his position would have sought doubtful refuge in the conclusion that he was insane; it did not occur to the Cimmerian to doubt his senses. He knew he was face to face with a demon of the Elder World, and the realization robbed him of all his faculties except sight.

The trunk of the horror was lifted and quested about, the topaz eyes stared unseeingly, and Conan knew the monster was blind. With the thought came a thawing of his frozen nerves, and he began to back silently toward the door. But the creature heard. The sensitive trunk stretched toward him, and Conan's horror froze him again when the being spoke, in a strange, stammering voice that never changed its key or timbre. The Cimmerian knew that those jaws were never built or intended for human speech.

"Who is here? Have you come to torture me again, Yara? Will you never be done? Oh, Yag-kosha, is there no end to agony?"

Tears rolled from the sightless eyes, and Conan's gaze strayed to the limbs stretched on the marble couch. And he knew the monster would not rise to attack him. He knew the marks of the rack, and the searing brand of the flame, and tough-souled as he was, he stood aghast at the ruined deformities which his reason told him had once been limbs as comely as his own. And suddenly all fear and repulsion went from him, to be replaced by a great pity. What this monster was, Conan could not know, but the evidences of its sufferings were so terrible and pathetic that a strange aching sadness came over the Cimmerian, he knew not why. He only felt that he was looking upon a cosmic tragedy, and he shrank with shame, as if the guilt of a whole race were laid upon him.

"I am not Yara," he said. "I am only a thief. I will not harm you."

"Come near that I may touch you," the creature faltered, and Conan came near unfearingly, his sword hanging forgotten in his hand. The sensitive trunk came out and groped over his face and shoulders, as a blind man gropes, and its touch was light as a girl's hand.

"You are not of Yara's race of devils," sighed the creature. "The clean, lean fierceness of the wastelands marks you. I know your people from of old, whom I knew by another name in the long, long ago when another world lifted its jeweled spires to the stars. There is blood on your fingers."

"A spider in the chamber above and a lion in the garden," muttered Conan.

"You have slain a man too, this night," answered the other. "And there is death in the tower above. I feel; I know."

"Aye," muttered Conan. "The prince of all thieves lies there dead from the bite of a vermin."

"So—and so!" the strange inhuman voice rose in a sort of low chant. "A slaying in the tavern and a slaying on the roof—I know; I feel. And the third will make the magic of which not even Yara dreams—oh, magic of deliverance, green gods of Yag!"

Again tears fell as the tortured body was rocked to and fro in the grip of varied emotions. Conan looked on, bewildered.

Then the convulsions ceased; the soft, sightless eyes were turned toward the Cimmerian, the trunk beckoned.

"Oh man, listen," said the strange being. "I am foul and monstrous to you, am I not? Nay, do not answer; I know. But you would seem as strange to me, could I see you. There are many worlds besides this earth, and life takes many shapes. I am neither god nor demon, but flesh and blood like yourself, though the substance differ in part, and the form be cast in different mold.

"I am very old, oh man of the waste countries; long and long ago I came to this planet with others of my world, from the green planet Yag, which circles for ever in the outer fringe of this universe. We swept through space on mighty wings that drove us through the cosmos quicker than light, because we had warred with the kings of Yag and were defeated and outcast. But we could never return, for on earth our wings withered from our shoulders. Here we abode apart from earthly life. We fought the strange and terrible forms of life which then walked the earth, so that we became feared, and were not molested in the dim jungles of the east, where we had our abode.

"We saw men grow from the ape and build the shining cities of Valusia, Kamelia, Commoria, and their sisters. We saw them reel before the thrusts of the heathen Atlanteans and Picts and Lemurians. We saw the oceans rise and engulf Atlantis and Lemuria, and the isles of the Picts, and the shining cities of civilization. We saw the survivors of Pictdom and Atlantis build their stone age empires, and go down to ruin, locked in bloody wars. We saw the Picts sink into abysmal savagery, the Atlanteans into apedom again. We saw new savages drift southward in conquering waves from the arctic circle to build a new civilization, with new kingdoms called Nemedia, and Koth, and Aquilonia and their sisters. We saw your people rise under a new name from the jungles of the apes that had been Atlanteans. We saw the descendants of the Lemurians who had survived the cataclysm, rise again through savagery and ride westward, as Hyrkanians. And we saw this race of devils, survivors of the ancient civilization that was before Atlantis sank, come once more into culture and power—this accursed kingdom of Zamora.

"All this we saw, neither aiding nor hindering the immutable cosmic law, and one by one we died; for we of Yag are not immortal, though our lives are as the lives of planets and constellations. At last I alone was left, dreaming of old times among the ruined temples of jungle-lost Khitai, worshipped as a god by an ancient yellow-skinned race. Then came Yara, versed in dark knowledge handed down through the days of barbarism, since before Atlantis sank.

"FIRST he sat at my feet and learned wisdom. But he was not satisfied with what I taught him, for it was white magic, and he wished evil lore, to enslave kings and glut a fiendish ambition. I would teach him none of the black secrets I had gained, through no wish of mine, through the eons.

"But his wisdom was deeper than I had guessed; with guile gotten among the dusky tombs of dark Stygia, he trapped me into divulging a secret I had not intended to bare; and turning my own power upon me, he enslaved me. Ah, gods of Yag, my cup has been bitter since that hour!

"He brought me up from the lost jungles of Khitai where the gray apes danced to the pipes of the yellow priests, and offerings of fruit and wine heaped my broken altars. No more was I a god to kindly jungle-folk—I was slave to a devil in human form."

Again tears stole from the unseeing eyes.

"He pent me in this tower which at his command I built for him in a single night. By fire and rack he mastered me, and by strange unearthly tortures you would not understand. In agony I would long ago have taken my own life, if I could. But he kept me alive—mangled, blinded, and broken—to do his foul bidding. And for three hundred years I have done his bidding, from this marble couch, blackening my soul with cosmic sins, and staining my wisdom with crimes, because I had no other choice. Yet not all my ancient secrets has he wrested from me, and my last gift shall be the sorcery of the Blood and the Jewel.

"For I feel the end of time draw near. You are the hand of Fate. I beg of you, take the gem you will find on yonder altar."

Conan turned to the gold and ivory altar indicated, and took up a great round jewel, clear as crimson crystal; and he knew that this was the Heart of the Elephant.

"Now for the great magic, the mighty magic, such as earth has not seen before, and shall not see again, through a million million of millenniums. By my life-blood I conjure it, by blood born on the green breast of Yag, dreaming far-poised in the great blue vastness of Space.

"Take your sword, man, and cut out my heart; then squeeze it so that the blood will flow over the red stone. Then go you down these stairs and enter the ebony chamber where Yara sits wrapped in lotus-dreams of evil. Speak his name and he will awaken. Then lay this gem before him, and say, 'Yag-kosha gives you a last gift and a last enchantment.' Then get you from the tower quickly; fear not, your way shall be made clear. The life of man is not the life of Yag, nor is human death the death of Yag. Let me be free of this cage of broken blind flesh, and I will once more be Yogah of Yag, morning-crowned and shining, with wings to fly, and feet to dance, and eyes to see, and hands to break."

Uncertainly Conan approached, and Yag-kosha, or Yogah, as if sensing his uncertainty, indicated where he should strike. Conan set his teeth and drove the sword deep. Blood streamed over the blade and his hand, and the monster started convulsively, then lay back quite still. Sure that life had fled, at least life as he understood it, Conan set to work on his grisly task and quickly brought forth something that he felt must be the strange being's heart, though it differed curiously from any he had ever seen. Holding the still pulsing organ over the blazing jewel, he pressed it with both hands, and a rain of blood fell on the stone. To his surprize, it did not run off, but soaked into

the gem, as water is absorbed by a sponge.

Holding the jewel gingerly, he went out of the fantastic chamber and came upon the silver steps. He did not look back; he instinctively felt that some sort of transmutation was taking place in the body on the marble couch, and he further felt that it was of a sort not to be witnessed by human eyes.

HE CLOSED the ivory door behind him and without hesitation descended the silver steps. It did not occur to him to ignore the instructions given him. He halted at an ebony door, in the center of which was a grinning silver skull, and pushed it open. He looked into a chamber of ebony and jet, and saw, on a black silken couch, a tall, spare form reclining. Yara the priest and sorcerer lay before him, his eyes open and dilated with the fumes of the yellow lotus, far-staring, as if fixed on gulfs and nighted abysses beyond human ken.

"Yara!" said Conan, like a judge pronouncing doom. "Awaken!"

The eyes cleared instantly and became cold and cruel as a vulture's. The tall silken-clad form lifted erect, and towered gauntly above the Cimmerian.

"Dog!" His hiss was like the voice of a cobra. "What do you here?"

Conan laid the jewel on the great ebony table.

"He who sent this gem bade me say, 'Yag-kosha gives a last gift and a last enchantment.' "

Yara recoiled, his dark face ashy. The jewel was no longer crystal-clear; its murky depths pulsed and throbbed, and curious smoky waves of changing color passed over its smooth surface. As if drawn hypnotically, Yara bent over the table and gripped the gem in his hands, staring into its shadowed depths, as if it were a magnet to draw the shuddering soul from his body. And as Conan looked, he thought that his eyes must be playing him tricks. For when Yara had risen up from his couch, the priest had seemed gigantically tall; yet now he saw that Yara's head would scarcely come to his shoulder. He blinked, puzzled, and for the first time that night, doubted his own senses. Then with a shock he realized that the priest was shrinking in stature—was growing smaller before his very gaze.

With a detached feeling he watched, as a man might watch a play; immersed in a feeling of overpowering unreality, the Cimmerian was no longer sure of his own identity; he only knew that he was looking upon the external evidences of the unseen play of vast Outer forces, beyond his understanding.

Now Yara was no bigger than a child; now like an infant he sprawled on the table, still grasping the jewel. And now the sorcerer suddenly realized his fate, and he sprang up, releasing the gem. But still he dwindled, and Conan saw a tiny, pigmy figure rushing wildly about the ebony table-top, waving tiny arms and shrieking in a voice that was like the squeak of an insect.

Now he had shrunk until the great jewel towered above him like a hill, and Conan saw him cover his eyes with his hands, as if to shield them from the glare, as he staggered about like a madman. Conan sensed that some unseen magnetic force was pulling Yara to the gem. Thrice he raced wildly about it in a narrowing circle, thrice he strove to turn and run out across the table; then with a scream that echoed faintly in the ears of the watcher, the priest threw up his arms and ran straight toward the blazing globe.

Bending close, Conan saw Yara clamber up the smooth, curving surface, impos-

sibly, like a man climbing a glass mountain. Now the priest stood on the top, still with tossing arms, invoking what grisly names only the gods know. And suddenly he sank into the very heart of the jewel, as a man sinks into a sea, and Conan saw the smoky waves close over his head. Now he saw him in the crimson heart of the jewel, once more crystal-clear, as a man sees a scene far away, tiny with great distance. And into the heart came a green, shining winged figure with the body of a man and the head of an elephant—no longer blind or crippled. Yara threw up his arms and fled as a madman flees, and on his heels came the avenger. Then, like the bursting of a bubble, the great jewel vanished in a rainbow burst of iridescent gleams, and the ebony table-top lay bare and deserted—as bare, Conan somehow knew, as the marble couch in the chamber above, where the body of that strange transcosmic being called Yag-kosha and Yogah had lain.

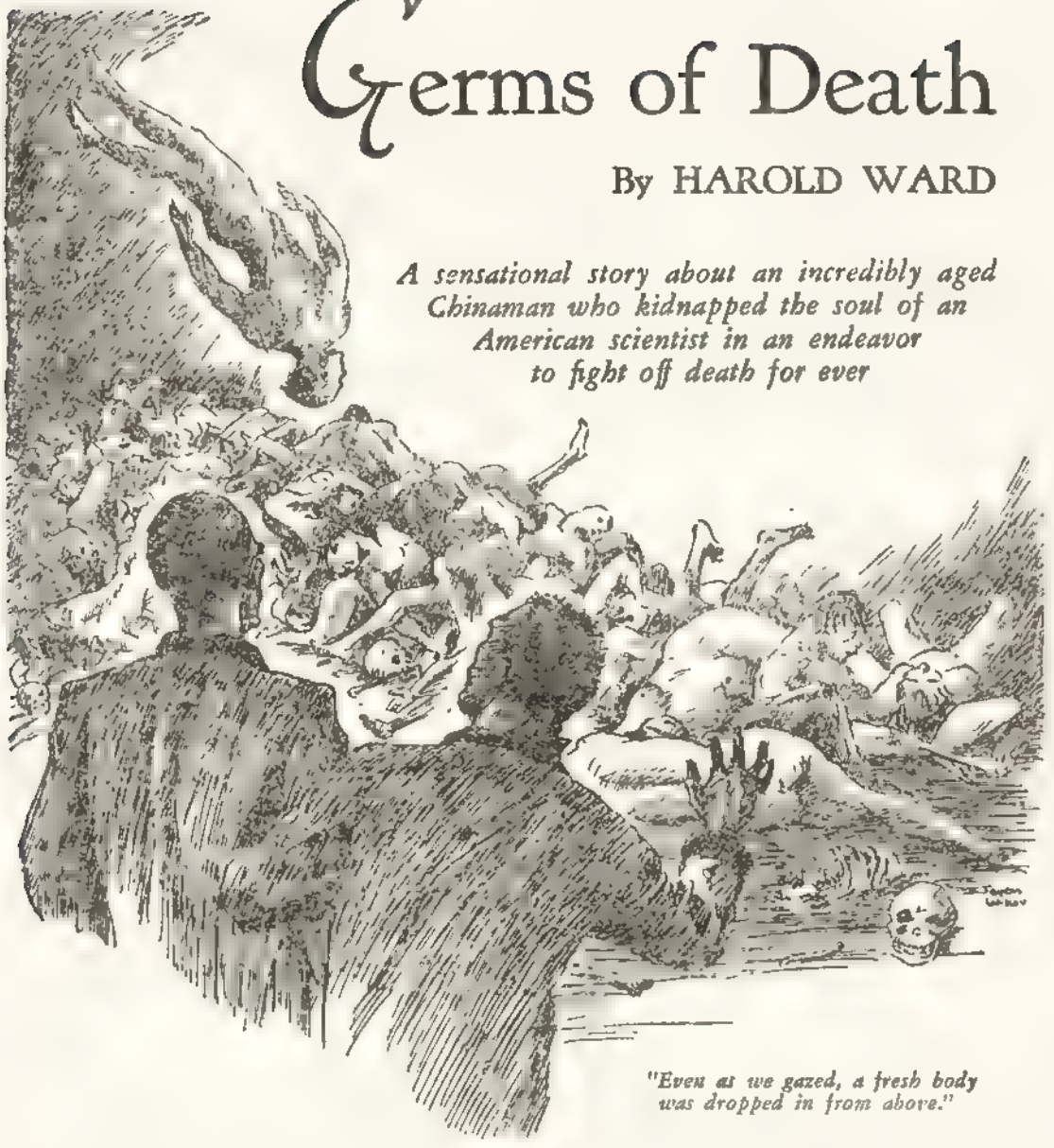
The Cimmerian turned and fled from the chamber, down the silver stairs. So mazed was he that it did not occur to him to escape from the tower by the way he had entered it. Down that winding, shadowy silver well he ran, and came into a large chamber at the foot of the gleaming stairs. There he halted for an instant; he had come into the room of the soldiers. He saw the glitter of their silver corselets, the sheen of their jeweled sword-hilts. They sat slumped at the banquet board, their dusky plumes waving somberly above their drooping helmeted heads; they lay among their dice and fallen goblets on the wine-stained lapis-lazuli floor. And he knew that they were dead. The promise had been made, the word kept; whether sorcery or magic or the falling shadow of great green wings had stilled the revelry, Conan could not know, but his way had been made clear. And a silver door stood open, framed in the whiteness of dawn.

Into the waving green gardens came the Cimmerian, and as the dawn wind blew upon him with the cool fragrance of luxuriant growths, he started like a man waking from a dream. He turned back uncertainly, to stare at the cryptic tower he had just left. Was he bewitched and enchanted? Had he dreamed all that had seemed to have passed? As he looked he saw the gleaming tower sway against the crimson dawn, its jewel-crusted rim sparkling in the growing light, and crash into shining shards.

Germs of Death

By HAROLD WARD

A sensational story about an incredibly aged Chinaman who kidnapped the soul of an American scientist in an endeavor to fight off death for ever



"Even as we gazed, a fresh body was dropped in from above."

IT HAD been a hard day at the laboratory and every nerve in my body shrieked for rest. I drowsed through dinner like a man in a trance, attempted to read afterward and, catching myself napping, finally threw down my book in disgust and retired.

I awoke with a start. An alien presence seemed to permeate the room. Shuddering, I attempted to reach the cord on the reading-lamp by the side of my bed, but some strange power held me back. Every faculty was paralyzed. I wanted to shriek—to summon my servant—but my vocal cords would make no sound. My tongue clove to the roof of my mouth. Only my brain seemed alive and it was a seething mass of panicky terror—an inferno of overmastering horror of the unknown.

What was it? What evil spell was oppressing me like an incubus? I was lying on my side facing the window. The night was dark and starless; even as I gazed

into the blackness the room commenced to fill with a soft, phosphorescent light. It grew stronger and stronger. I tried to tell myself that it was the moon filtering through some fleecy cloud, but my fear-filled subconsciousness refused to swallow the lie.

Slowly the strange, weird glow divided itself into two rays. They darted here and there like beacon-fires, circling and dancing from place to place until they finally settled full upon my face. My eyes glared back at them unblinkingly, for their peculiar brightness had no effect upon my pupils. It seemed as if I could trace them on and on through the starless sky to where they found birth on a mountain peak protruding above the clouds.

Somewhere outside a night bird shrieked raucously. The grating sound startled me out of the panic which gripped me. I tried to bring cold logic and reasoning to bear upon my condition, but in vain. The very atmosphere seemed filled with evil.

Slowly the scene changed. My vision, following the twin beams to their source, saw the rocky eminence dissolve into a human face partly hidden behind a mass of black, scurrying clouds. A human face, I say, but what a face! Hard, ruthless, crafty, age-weathered, demoniacal, it glared at me through slanting, almond-shaped eyes, that glittered like fires of hell, piercing the darkness like projectiles of molten metal. I tried to close my lids against them, but in vain. They burned themselves into my pupils until they seared the very core of my brain.

An urge crept over me—an overmastering desire to hurl myself through space. Invisible hands seemed to tear me from my bed. I fought against them with every bit of will-power at my command; but those glittering, menacing orbs dragged at me, pulling at me as a magnet attracts a bit of iron. I felt myself lifted . . . I was floating. . . .

The window-screen was jerked from its hooks by strange hands; they were my hands—I noted my seal ring on one of the fingers—yet they were the hands of some one else. How can I describe my sensations? I was myself, John Dolby, yet I was another person. I was like a man who sees his own figure projected upon the screen.

I dropped. Down . . . down . . . down. . . .

Then sudden blackness engulfed me.

I OPENED my eyes and gazed wonderingly at the crushed and bleeding figure that lay upon the cold, hard pavement beneath my window. I knew that it was I—that I had succumbed to the urge of those cruel eyes and had committed suicide. Yet—and here comes again one of the strange oddities of my fantastic tale—*it was not I.* I was divided again; I was two separate and distinct entities. I was lying, a battered heap, upon the stones of the street, yet I was standing beside my own body looking at myself as one gazes upon an old suit of clothes that he has discarded. A huge policeman came running up; he muttered a startled curse. Then, jerking his whistle from his pocket, he shrilled for help. He paid no attention to me. It was my body that attracted his attention. I floated around him like vapor. . . .

Again I was drifting through space, dragged onward and upward and yet held to earth. I felt myself stretching like a rubber band. Two attractions were at work, one holding me back, the other pulling me upward. . . .

Next I was standing by the side of a rude bed. Around me danced those hard, cruel eyes. There were thousands of them now; they filled the space, it seemed,

for millions and millions of miles. Yet there was a man upon the bed. And he, too, was twain, for he stood beside me, a tall, wraith-like figure in flowing robes, his saffron face convulsed with fury.

"Back! Back!" he shrieked. "I will not die to make a place for you!"

I gazed down at the quiet form upon the bed. I knew that it was not I—that it belonged to this lemon-skinned man who sought to hold me away—yet it was also I. The dancing eyes pulled me closer. A quiet voice whispered in my ear that I must claim my own. The vaporish figure gnashed his teeth. His hands were against my shoulders. He attempted to push me away. Slowly the pressure relaxed, and he dissolved into nothingness. . . .

Again I awoke with a start. For a moment I lay stretching and yawning, wondering at my strange dream. I was still weary, and for an instant I was tempted to roll over and go to sleep again. Then, remembering the task that I had left unfinished at the laboratory, I forced myself to open my eyes. I sat up with an exclamation of surprize.

God in heaven! It was not a dream!

The morning sun was shining through the window. The room was strangely unfamiliar—a huge, Oriental-appearing chamber with stone walls. It was overflowing with lavish trappings and rare draperies. Even the bed was not my own. What had happened? Where was I? Had I met with an accident? Was my fantastic nightmare the result of an ether-fuddled brain? Was this a hospital?

A movement beside me brought my ruminations to a sudden close. I turned my head, expecting to be greeted by a white-clad nurse. Instead, a man was sitting by my bedside. He looked up from the book he was reading and greeted me with a slight nod.

"Good morning!" he said. The voice was harsh, stilted and metallic.

I gazed at him wonderingly. His face, distinctly Mongolian, was thin, seamed with age, ruthless. He was unusually tall, emaciated; his yellow skin as dry as parchment; his eyes, sunken into their sockets, black as coals; they glittered like those of a snake. His left arm hung useless by his side. I noted, too, that his left leg was withered and twisted and that the side of his face twitched and jerked spasmodically. A crutch leaned against the chair. He was clad in a loose, flowing garment of white, and a black skull-cap adorned his hairless head.

There was something strangely familiar about the fellow. I knew that I had seen him before. I strove to recollect.

Then, suddenly, it flashed over me. His was the face that I had seen in the night —the face behind the mass of clouds high in the heavens. His were the eyes—those cruel, evil-filled eyes—that had dragged at me. . . .

2

HAD my senses tricked me? Was I still dreaming? For an instant longer I lay there gazing at the hideous face. Then I pulled myself to a sitting position.

"Where the devil am I?" I demanded. "And, by the same token, who are you?"

The aged yellow man chuckled low, mockingly.

"I am Yah Hoon," he rasped. "Doubtless the name is unfamiliar to you, but fame is only a fleeting thing at best; so what matters whether you know me or not? We will grow better acquainted as time goes on. As to your whereabouts—you are in Tibet——"

"Tibet?" I gasped.

He nodded. Then he went on, his rasping voice fairly crackling with energy.

"I needed you; what I need I take. Like yourself, I am a scientist. And science, as you, a scientist, must admit, refuses to be bound by the so-called human law."

I leaped out of bed in a spasm of fury.

"What chicanery is this?" I roared. "I——"

He held up his gaunt right hand in a gesture of impatience.

"Dress!" he commanded curtly. "And cease arguing." He indicated a loose robe similar to the one he was wearing. "Unfortunately I could not transport your clothes through the ether, so you will have to content yourself with those you find. The man whose body I borrowed for you did not find them uncomfortable, I assure you. At least, he was loth to give them to you."

He chuckled grimly at his jest. Then, with a jerk of his thumb, he indicated a long mirror set into the rocky wall. I took a step toward it, only to leap back with an exclamation of horror. The man who stared back at me was a Mongolian —a slant-eyed, yellow-skinned creature with high forehead. It was he whose body I had seen lying upon the bed. It was the wraith-like thing who had tried to drive me back.

My brain was whirling. Who was I? I knew that I was Doctor John Dolby, the man who had discovered and segregated the previously unsuspected paranoiac germ and made it possible for medical science to combat that dread disease successfully. I knew that I was a well-known figure in the world of medicine and science because of my researches in the field of bacterioscopy and pathogeny. Yet how could I be Doctor John Dolby when I was this strange being whose reflection scowled back at me from the glass? I turned to Yah Hoon, my lips drawn back over my fangs in a wolfish snarl.

"Explain!" I demanded, a wave of anger surging over me.

He spread his right hand out, palm up, in a gesture of impatience.

"You, one of the world's greatest scientists, asking for an explanation?" he mocked with an amused glitter in his snake-like eyes. "All right, my friend, you shall have it. You are in Koko-Nur, a lost city on an island in the Chaidam marsh in the province of Tasidam in Tibet. A glance through the window will prove my statement. As to how you got here—there you have a question more difficult for me to answer."

He arose and, leaning on his crutch, pointed down to his crippled side.

"I am old—very old," he said with a touch of sadness in his voice, "so old that death long ago marked me for his own. I fear death—hate it! Only by force of will have I staved it off. And I will cheat it yet, even though it creeps upon me like a wolf in the dark, seeking to catch me unawares."

He cackled mirthlessly at his own words.

"You ask me how you got here," he went on. "You demand an explanation. Listen: Broken and withered though my body is, within this skull of mine is stored the wisdom of the ages. With the power of thought man can do anything, even fight off death for a short space of time. But with your help, my friend, I will renew my life. I will live for ever!

"I have heard of your work," he went on. "For even here in this God-forsaken hole news seeps in; my agents are everywhere seeking out that which they think will aid me in my experiments. There are thousands of other scientists, any one of whom would make me an efficient laboratory assistant. But you—ah, my friend, I have not forgotten your out-

standing work in pathogenic bacteria. It has made you an outstanding figure in the world of vaccinotherapy. No one else has the technical learning for my advanced needs. I, crippled and pain-racked, could not go to you. So I willed that you should come to me. You answered my call."

"I do not understand?" I gasped, still bewildered. "One can not transport a body through the ether."

"No," he smiled. "But remember that there is no life, intelligence or substance in matter. All is mind—thought. I captured your intellect—your soul, as it were. I care not a whit for your carcass. By the power of my will I threw Huang, the man whose body you wear, into a death-like trance last night. Perhaps he is dead as we know death. Be that as it may, your thought—your intelligence—obeyed my command and took possession of his stalwart young frame. And it is your intellect that will finish this great experiment for me.

"Understand me," he went on, "after death intellect still functions, for it is the soul—the germ of everything. But I fear dissolution and do not wish to go that route. I would live for ever—on and on to the very end of time. Perhaps I may even allow you to taste the fruits of my discovery. Who knows?"

His face was twisted into a sardonic grin. He cackled mirthlessly in a cracked treble, his almond eyes narrowed and twitched. The effort was too great for him, and he dropped back into his chair with a groan of pain.

"Old age! Old age!" he shrieked. "God, what a tragedy! Power! I shall have power when death has ceased to be. The world will worship at my feet. Eventually I will rule the earth. Kings and dictators will bow to me; thrones will totter and fall. That is why I came here. They would kill me rather than allow me to continue. That is why I buried myself in this forgotten hole, that I might work undisturbed. There was another reason, too, a reason that you will soon understand. But I must rest for a moment. The strain is too great for me."

He leaned back against the cushions, his breath coming in great gasps.

"Death!" he murmured to himself. "Death! God, what a filthy thing it is! I hate it—hate it with an intensity such as man has never had before. I——"

His voice died away in a tired whisper. He closed his eyes. For a moment I thought that he slept.

I STEPPED softly across the room to where a narrow window was carved out of the rock. For a moment I devoured the scene spread out before me. Then I, too, dropped into a chair with a groan. Great heavens! It was not a dream. Around me on all sides, as far as the eye could see, stretched a strange city—a city of quaint, box-like, white, almost windowless buildings—a city of distinctly foreign aspect. Men and women in outlandish garb walked its streets and jostled in the market-place: Mongols, Tibetans, Chinese, Burmese—a mixture of many nationalities.

Little wonder I gasped again as it all flashed over me. I, John Dolby, Master of Science, Doctor of Medicine, Bachelor of Arts, Doctor of Laws, possessor of many degrees, had gone to sleep in my own apartment in New York, only to wake up next morning in a strange bed in this far-off city. And, even worse, I was not John Dolby. I was some one else—a man called Huang—a saffron-skinned man with crafty, slanted eyes and cunning, tricky features.

Yet I was not this creature. I was John Dolby.

3

YAH HOON was mad. That much was apparent to me from the very first. Yet he was a genius—a Chinaman of rare intelligence who had, in some manner, found his way to this city hidden in the marshes, to use it for his own foul purposes. He was bewildering, horrifying, like a walking dead man with the face of a devil.

"Death is a disease," he remarked, leaning back in his chair and refilling his long-stemmed pipe from a bowl of tobacco at his side. He lit it from a brazier suspended from the ceiling and, puffing slowly, gazed at me cynically through half-closed eyes. His spasm of weakness had passed away and he was, apparently, himself again. "Death causes sickness. Wrong, did I hear you say? But I am not wrong. Let me explain. Stricken down with this accursed paralysis at the very height of my experiments, I have had plenty of time to reflect.

"The atmosphere which surrounds us is filled with germs of death. We draw these tiny bacteria into our systems with every breath. They are constantly at work seeking to undermine our bodies. Every blow we strike, every step we take, every thought that flashes through our brains is accompanied by the disintegration of a certain amount of muscular or nervous fiber. Thus each action of our corporeal life, from its beginning to its end, takes place at the expense of the vitality of a part of our organized structure."

He smiled at my look of incredulity. Then, with a gesture of impatience, he went on.

"These germs of death fill every lung cell. They course through our veins. They find resting-places amid our bones and tissues, waiting an opportunity to strike. Perhaps years pass before the chance comes. But when it does come, they are lightning-like in their rapidity. Sometimes they strike in childhood; often not until we have reached mature years. But once they gain a foothold, disease invariably follows—a war to the finish between the body and the germ—a conflict in which the Grim Reaper is always the victor."

"Old age?" I interrupted, interested in spite of myself in his weird philosophy. "Your own case, for instance?"

"Ah!" he snarled, his right hand resting on the arm of the chair closing until the knuckles showed white under the saffron skin. For an instant there was silence—dreadful, awesome. Then he leaned forward, his jet-black eyes glaring into my own.

"The natural decay of the organs brought about by these germs of death," he rasped. "That is my answer to your question regarding old age. My brain has been too active. I weakened certain cells by over-thinking. The bacteria were in my system; they found my weakness and commenced their accursed work. That is why you are here. You can do things, while I can only think, and think and think—of death."

He refilled his long-stemmed pipe again and relighted it with an almost defiant glance at me as if he dared me to dispute his statement.

"You have read Jenner?" he demanded.

"Naturally," I answered.

"Then you understand my theory. I propose to cope with death as Jenner coped with smallpox," he resumed. "With your help I will isolate these germs of death of which I spoke. After segregating them, I will prepare a virus from them for the prevention and treatment of death. Jenner's theory of vaccination has been extended to several other diseases, among them asthma, typhoid fever, pneumonia, hay-fever and others. Jenner

was right in his hypothesis, but he, to use one of your Americanisms, got off on the wrong foot. He sought to prevent the disease that caused death. He should—and he is not the first physician to err—have vaccinated against the death which created the disease. If we inoculate against disease, we have simply halted death for an instant; if we inoculate against death, there will be no disease. Have I made myself clear?"

I stared at him aghast.

"Then there will be no death," I said in an awed whisper.

He nodded.

"Once this bacterium is discovered and prepared in the form of virus, its injection will stop all human ills and life will be prolonged for ever," he answered.

He raised his clenched right fist and shook it in a sudden spasm.

"Life! Eternal life!" he shrieked. "God, how I long for it! I feel the Grim Reaper creeping upon me. We must work fast."

The man's mood changed. He got up from his seat with an effort and, adjusting his crutch beneath his arm, indicated that I was to follow him.

"My efforts have, so far, been mere gestures in the right direction," he went on. "But let us start at the beginning. I will first show you the laboratory. It is best that you inspect the tools with which you will work."

A flush of anger mounted to my face at his tone and I doubled my fists until the nails bit into the flesh.

"I am not yours to command!" I snarled. "I——"

He turned his head slowly in my direction, his beady eyes glaring at me. A cold chill chased up and down my spine. I halted midway in my speech, my tongue cleaving to the roof of my mouth. A nebulous haze appeared in front of my face. I tried to fight it off, but in vain. It seemed to me that the world was filled with age-worn faces and sulfurous eyes. They danced around me, dragging me forward against my will. The room swam in circles, the floor swaying up and down like the deck of a ship in a choppy sea. I swayed and would have fallen had I not clutched the carved back of one of the chairs.

"Fool!" Yah Hoon snapped. "Now follow me."

The mist cleared away. I rubbed my eyes sleepily. He was hobbling painfully toward a narrow door at the end of the room without giving me a second glance. And I, like a dog that has been chastised, followed in his wake.

He opened the door. From it a circular flight of steps led downward, ending in a passageway cut in the stone. It, in turn, led to a second door. Yah Hoon threw it open and, stepping inside, halted and waited for me to enter. I stepped past him, then paused in astonishment.

IT WAS a large room—as big, in fact, as that used for laboratory purposes in some of our best colleges—a compartment seemingly carved out of solid rock and lighted by braziers set in wrought-iron sconces fastened to the walls. Its shelves and benches and tables were also of stone; they were covered with flasks and beakers and bottles of every size and description. I drew closer and inspected them. There were chemicals of which even I, with my long experience, had no knowledge. Here, too, were microscopes of the finest quality, test-tubes, pipettes, Bunsen burners—everything needed for research work. Even my own workshop in the college was a paltry thing compared to this gigantic scientific array.

My face must have betrayed the excitement under which I labored, for Yah Hoon's countenance twisted into a wry smile as I turned to him.

"You like it?" he questioned.

"Wonderful!" I exclaimed. "To think that such a magnificent laboratory is buried so far from civilization."

"I am a Chinaman," he answered proudly. "From the beginning of time the Chinese have been the leaders in scientific research. I have been years gathering this collection. As I told you before, my agents have searched the globe for the latest in apparatus and chemicals. I am old, Dolby, much older than you imagine, and wealthy, too, beyond the dreams of avarice. Yet the greater part of my life has been spent in this very room. I have dedicated myself to the one objective—the search for eternal life. For what value has gold, and what does my more precious store of knowledge avail me, if my bones are moldering in the tomb?"

He stopped suddenly.

"We scientists are all alike," he grunted with a shrug of his thin shoulders. "We are what you in America call 'nuts.' But enough. I have other wonders to show you—the reservoir from which you will draw your material."

He hobbled over to what looked like a solid section of the wall and pressed against one of the shelves. A portion of rock slid noiselessly to one side, revealing another flight of steps leading to the bottom of a narrow well. We followed them downward; the end of the shaft disclosed a tunnel hewn out of the rocks. Yah Hoon led the way along this tunnel, lighting braziers set in the walls from the taper which he carried. At the end of the defile was another set of steps leading downward. They ended in a cul-de-sac.

The Chinaman turned to me again.

"This workshop of mine is, like many others in Tibet, built into the side of a hill," he said. "I selected it from many when I came here because of its peculiar location. The rocky mountain into which it is cut is hollow—perhaps a small, extinct volcano. Be that as it may, they have a curious custom of burial here—a custom I never encountered before. I brought many of my countrymen with me. Under my direction they hewed these steps and tunnels into the very womb of the hill. Later they died—for it is not well that too many should share my secret. So now you, of all the world, possess the knowledge of this entrance."

Again he stopped, a twisted grin creeping over his leathery face. I shuddered in spite of myself, for it was easy to guess the meaning of his words.

"As I just told you, because of the custom of the inhabitants of this place of burying their dead *en masse* in the hollow mountain, I picked this town for the center of my activities," he went on. "And, now, Dolby, gaze upon my treasure trove."

He chuckled mirthlessly as he stuck the lighted taper into a niche in the wall.

"Note where I press," he warned, touching a certain spot in the stone.

A slab of rock in front of us rolled away. I stepped back with an exclamation of horror as a draft of fetid air struck me full in the face. Then, at a sign from Yah Hoon, I drew closer.

We were standing at the edge of an enormous cavern, many acres in extent and towering upward several hundred feet. In the roof was a small hole through which the sun was streaming, bringing out the horrors of the place in curious highlights and shadows.

It was a gigantic charnel-house. The floor was covered with human skeletons —thousands of them. Upon them, piled almost to the ceiling, were corpses—men, women, children—in various stages of dissolution. They formed a huge pyramid caused by the slipping down of the bodies

from the apex as fresh ones were dropped in from above.

There they lay, the new-dead mingling with the bones of their ancestors, naked corpses with glassy eyes and twisted limbs. They glared at us from all sides —horrible, grotesque caricatures of humanity. Even as we gazed, a fresh body was dropped in from above. It rolled down at us, bounding, dancing, arms flopping like those of a scarecrow, bringing down an avalanche of other carcasses with it. Singularly, it ceased movement almost at our feet and, rolling on its back as it stopped, stared up at us icily, its lips drawn back in a leering grin.

"God!" I shrieked, dropping back with a shudder.

Yah Hoon cackled gleefully.

"Yet you wonder why I fear death," he said grimly. "Can you blame me, knowing as I do that I shall soon be as that thing unless I can find a way to stave off the king of terrors? How do you know, my friend, that you are not dead even now? It is in my mind that the body of John Dolby lies in some American undertaker's shop. Yet you are here, and the body you inhabit is that of another man. Explain that."

Again he chuckled. His voice echoed and re-echoed through the cavern.

The world was swimming before my eyes. I turned away, drawn by another will than my own. It seemed as if another man—the one whose body I wore —was standing beside me, warning me, trying to drag me back. . . .

4

THERE is one puzzling thing about these memories of mine. The time element is vague, indistinct. I can only tell the passage of time by going back over the newspapers dating from my death up to the present. Sometimes it seems as if I had always been Huang, a native of Koko-Nur; again I have misty recollections of a former life in Tibet. My only explanation is that, in inheriting the body of Huang, Yah Hoon's assistant, I also came into possession of a bit of his brain that had not died with him and that this piece of gray matter functions subconsciously.

And yet another thought comes to me. Was Huang really dead when I took possession of his framework? Or was he merely in a trance? Is it not possible that he, in striving to regain his mortal body, sometimes gains possession of my thoughts? Who knows? But why speculate? It gets me nowhere. I am a creature accursed.

Fear! God, what a reign of fear I went through in the great stone house of Yah Hoon the Chinaman in Koko-Nur—a procession of nightmares in which the parchment-like face of Yah Hoon was intermingled with the spawn of the charnel-house. Even now I wake up with a start, the cold sweat standing out on my forehead in great globules, imagining that I am back there in that huge laboratory hewn in the solid rock, a dozen dead bodies surrounding me, while on the other side of the door the carrion is piled high within the cavern. And over everything is the sickening stench of death and dissolution. Would I have these dreams if I had not passed through the horrors of which I write?

I was a prisoner within that rock-bound cavern. Not a prisoner in the sense that I was guarded, for I was not; but nevertheless I was confined within the four walls as securely as if surrounded by a million armed guards, for I was tied down by the power of thought. Time after time I tried to break away—to get out—to shriek my fantastic story to the world; for even in Koko-Nur, in far-off Tibet, I believe that there were men of

brains—men who would listen to reason. Yet I was never able to combat the superior will of Yah Hoon—the will that ordered me to remain.

From the time I arrived until the fatal day when Yah Hoon died I never left that grim, stone building with its rear cut into the hillside. Yah Hoon, wise old fox that he was, sensed my feelings, without a doubt, yet he said nothing. Only many, many times I have seen him gazing at me from under his drooping lids, a cynical smile twisting across his wrinkled face. He reminded me of some huge gargoyle—some unclean monster carved out of the rock from which his dwelling was made. Yet he held me in a mesmeric spell, just as a serpent hypnotizes a bird. There must have been a touch of cruelty in his make-up, for I am certain that he got a quiet satisfaction out of watching me writhe beneath the pressure of his thought.

I am not going into detail. Suffice to say that day after day I bent over my test-tubes and burners, experimenting, testing, laboring like a work-horse at Yah Hoon's command. Under the impetus of his powerful will I carried on the work that he had started. But since I was under the dictation of Yah Hoon's mind, how was it possible for me to carry on my experiments independent of him? For had I not been allowed to use my own scientific knowledge—had Yah Hoon suggested every move I made—I would have been nothing more than a mere laboratory assistant. And, remember, Yah Hoon had seized me for what I knew. Perhaps I can explain, even though the task is a difficult one. Yah Hoon held me in his spell, he forced me to work; yet he merely presented the problem to be solved, never interfering with the methods used. Results were what he demanded, caring not how they were obtained. I was a machine which, started in the right direction, went on and on and on until I reached the end of the road.

And the dead! Ugh! That charnel-house filled with stark, naked bodies, their fishy eyes glaring at me from out of the darkness. I was a ghoul, a despoiler of graves, the lowest thing that mortal man can sink to. I surrounded myself with cadavers. The tables were covered with them; they were stacked on all sides like cordwood. The great laboratory was permeated with their horrible stench.

And Yah Hoon—may his foul soul burn in hell!—forced me to do these things. His beady eyes were always upon me. Hunched up in his great armchair by the side of the dissecting-table, he watched my progress day by day. He drove me. He knew that his life was fast ebbing away—that he was living on borrowed time—and he was ever in a rush to finish the task and stave off death before it struck him down. There was a panicky look on his aged face at every failure. Under his direction I cut and experimented — wallowing like a hog amid the filth of the charnel-house. At his command I distilled, brewed, segregated and refined. He scarce allowed me time to eat and sleep. I became an automaton—a machine—my brain so dulled by loss of sleep that I worked in a trance.

Yah Hoon ate little. There were no servants. From some unknown source he obtained provisions of a sort for my use, and I prepared my own simple meals.

Guinea-pigs! The place teemed with them. Upon them we tried the results of our experiments, inoculating them with the virus we made. And the result was always the same—death. With each failure he pushed me the harder, forcing me on and on in his mad search for the germ that snuffed the divine spark, but

which, he believed, when properly prepared, would result in eternal life.

Time after time it seemed that success was almost within our grasp. Once a guinea-pig we inoculated lived for hours. It was only by sheer force of will that Yah Hoon kept from toppling over in the excess of his joy. From somewhere his powerful thought brought a man through the door—a poor, slinking creature of the dregs of Koko-Nur. He attempted to draw back when his terror-filled eyes fell upon the pile of dead. But Yah Hoon's will held him. Slowly, reluctantly, like a man walking in his sleep, he advanced until he stood before us cringing and fawning like a mongrel dog.

I leaped forward like a tiger that smells blood. I tried to hold myself back, but the urge was communicated to me by my master's will. I had no control over myself as I seized the frightened creature's arm and, jabbing the needle to the hilt in the flabby flesh, shot home the plunger that injected into his throbbing veins the virus we had made.

For a full sixty seconds the poor devil made no move. Then he gave a sudden shriek as the death vaccine struck his heart. He plunged forward and fell in a heap upon the smooth, stone floor. I turned my head to see how the guinea-pig fared. It, too, had died.

Yah Hoon filled his pipe with fingers that trembled.

"Another failure!" he snarled, applying a lighted taper to the soothing weed. "Another failure—and my time is almost up. I feel it—sense it."

From that time on he worked me harder than ever.

5

THE time element was entirely lacking in my life in Koko-Nur. I was there for ten years. I learned this upon my return when I checked through the files of the newspapers from the time of my "death" up to the present. Time existed for me only as a hazy, misty fantasmagoria of horrors, each one more dreadful than the preceding. There are great blanks in my memory. I recall only the highlights of what happened in that inferno of Yah Hoon's. The details are missing.

There was never a time during my stay there that I was not John Dolby. My thoughts were those of John Dolby. It was his brain that directed me in the final act of the tragedy, even though my body was that of Huang, the Tibetan.

What caused me to attempt suicide? That is a question I am unable to answer. I only know that I ran amuck—that something in John Dolby's brain finally snapped under the strain. A man temporarily deranged can not be hypnotized, nor can an unconscious man become a hypnotist. There are but two solutions: either I was mad or Yah Hoon had suffered another stroke which, for the nonce, caused him to lose his mental hold over me. The preceding events are missing from my memory and, strive as I will, I can not recall them.

I know that I found myself standing in the middle of the great laboratory. That is my first recollection of what happened. Around me was the wreckage of the costly apparatus that Yah Hoon had accumulated through the years.

We had completed an experiment a short time before. How long before I do not know, since, as I have already stated, I have no remembrance of details. The body of our latest victim—a pink-nosed guinea-pig—lay upon the table. Beside it was a cadaver from which we had extracted the poison for the virus sealed in the test-tube almost at my elbow.

The door opened and Yah Hoon hobbled in. As his beady eyes viewed the

scene of destruction, he gave a gasp of astonishment. For the nonce I was free from his domination. The thought made me wild. I shrieked with maniacal laughter as I hurled a beaker at his snarling face. It crashed against the stone wall. Seizing the syringe, half filled with the vaccine we had made, I jabbed the needle into my arm and pressed the plunger home.

The eyes of Yah Hoon danced around me. They dazzled me. I felt my senses slipping. My ears rang with the command to desist. As well argue with the devil as with me just then. I believed that I was to die; I leaned against the stone dissecting-table and waited for death to strike.

But instead of death came a renewal of life. We had succeeded at last. Something—some one of the elements we had used—needed only time to develop. As the virus ranged through my veins a sense of exultation surged over me—a peculiar feeling of lightness. I seemed to be floating in midair.

"At last!" Yah Hoon shouted gleefully, forgetting in seeing me still alive the destruction I had wrought. "We have succeeded! Life is for ever mine! Mine!"

With his words came recollection again. The thought flashed over me that Yah Hoon would, after all these years, inherit eternal life—that he would be free to work his hellish will upon an unsuspecting world.

Already his palsied hand was stretched forth to seize the test-tube. I jerked it from him and hurled it to the floor. It broke into a thousand fragments.

Yah Hoon shrieked. God, how he shrieked! It was the wail of a lost soul. A look of grim despair came into his face. For an instant he stood swaying; then the crutch dropped from his nerveless grasp and he sprawled in a heap at my feet. The shock had killed him.

Then recollection left me.

How did I return to America? I do not know. I only know that I am here and that I am John Dolby. I did not die in Koko-Nur, nor did I die in that fall from the window ten years ago. I can never die. The virus I injected into my veins that mad day will force me to live for ever. I must spend an eternity behind the bars of this dreadful place. . . .

Huang is with me again. He is standing beside me as I write, reading each word as my pen puts it down. He whispers that I am wrong—that freedom is mine if I but claim it. He has told me the way. He waits to claim his body. . . .

But the intellect never dies, Yah Hoon claimed. I do not understand it all. Why should Huang wish his mortal body, since he can live in it but a few short years, while his soul goes on and on? Why does something keep drawing me to the crypt in the mausoleum at Riverview Cemetery wherein the body of John Dolby lies?

Huang bids me hasten. . . .

* * * * *

NOTE: A Mongolian known as Huang, a patient in this institution, believed to be a native of Tibet, committed suicide in his cell this morning by opening a vein in his wrist. The foregoing manuscript was found hidden beneath the blankets of his bunk.

(Signed) *ROBERT MONTGOMERY,*
Managing Officer, Stateville Hospital for the Insane.

"He was slung across the saddle-bow, and the cavalcade rode away."

Buccaneers of Venus

By OTIS ADELBERT KLINE

A powerful weird-scientific story by a master of science-fiction—a swift-moving tale of piracy, and weird monsters on another planet

The Story Thus Far

ROBERT GRANDON, young Chicago clubman who had fought his way to the throne of Reabon, mightiest empire of the planet Venus, was honeymooning on the sea-coast with his beautiful young bride, Vernia, Princess of Reabon, when she was carried off by the Huitsenni, a hairless, toothless yellow race of buccaneers against which Grandon had previously formed a secret alliance with three other Venusian rulers.

Grandon instantly set out in pursuit of the pirate fleet in a small fishing-boat, accompanied by Kantar the Gunner, who was an expert with the Venusian machine-guns, known as torks and mattorks. They were captured by the buccaneers, but managed to escape in Huitsen, the hidden port of the pirates, and join forces with the Chispoks, a secret society opposed to piratical practises. With the help of the Chispoks, Grandon and Kantar were able to get into the royal palace, where Grandon beheaded Yin Yin, the ruler. Kantar, who was supposed to rescue Vernia, carried off by mistake another captive princess, Narine, daughter of Ad of Tyrhana, one of Grandon's allies. Vernia, meanwhile, was abducted by Heg, Rogo of the Ibbits, a race of fur-covered savages inhabiting the antarctic wastes south of Huitsen.

Kantar and Narine, with the help of the Chispoks, managed to escape from Huitsen in a small boat. But they had not gone

This story began in WEIRD TALES for November

far when their mast was shot away by a pursuing pirate vessel.

In the meantime, Grandon, who had heard Vernia's cry as she was being carried off by Heg, followed and rescued her, killing the savage chieftain. They managed to escape his followers by riding away in a blizzard on the strange mounts of these people, huge beasts called zandars. They passed the night in a cave, but in the morning when they awoke, they discovered their riding-animals were gone. They separated to search for them, and Vernia was seized by a gigantic web-spinning scorpion which had previously captured their zandars. She was hung up in its web beside the monster's cocoon, as food for its young. Shortly thereafter, one of the young scorpions broke out of the cocoon, and ambled toward her.

CHAPTER 16

ZINLO OF OLBA

With its mast shot away, the little sailboat in which rode Kantar the Gunner, Narine of Tyrhana, and San Thoy, would not respond to the rudder, but came about and drifted broadside to the waves, rocking precariously, while mattork shells exploded all around it. The two pursuing pirate ships now bore down on the helpless boat.

Despite the increased difficulty of aiming his weapon, occasioned by the erratic plunging of the little craft, the skilful gunner succeeded in shattering a few spars and damaging the rigging of one of their pursuers with his explosive bullets. But as the two ships drew closer, he ceased firing, knowing that in surrender now lay their only hope of life. Abandoning his weapon, he hurried forward, where he found Narine still endeavoring to manage the other mattork.

"Stop shooting," he said, "or the pirates will blow us to pieces. They are bound to hit us when they get a little closer."

"I hope they do," she replied as she fired another shot, which, on account of the rocking of the boat, went wide of the mark. "To me death is preferable to falling again into their hands."

As if in answer to her wish a shell struck them aft, the next moment, completely demolishing the stern. Kantar and Narine were both hurled against the cabin by the force of the concussion, and San Thoy shot from his steersman's seat to a point on the deck quite near them. The hold filled almost instantly, and the boat plunged beneath the waves.

As they went down, Kantar seized Narine's wrist. A moment later they came up, struggling and sputtering in the water.

"Let me go," she demanded, as soon as she could get her breath. "I can take care of myself."

The gunner relinquished her wrist, and grinning maliciously, said: "Well, you had your wish. I hope you are enjoying the consequences."

Without replying, she turned and swam for a bit of wreckage larger than the others that bobbed around them. It had once been part of the after deck. Kantar looked around for San Thoy, and seeing him clinging to a heavy beam which could easily support him in the water, he leisurely followed Narine. The pirate ships ceased firing, and one of them was now only about three hundred yards distant.

Swimming up beside the girl's bit of wreckage, Kantar rested an arm upon it.

"May I share this luxurious float with you?" he asked, smiling.

"If you will try to be agreeable," she answered. "But one more word of sarcasm and I'll——"

"You'll what?"

"Duck you."

"Try it."

She did, forcing his head, unresisting, under water. She held it there until she considered that his punishment had been sufficient, then removed her hand. But he didn't come up. Instead, his face remained under water and he floated limply there beside the wreckage. She pulled his hair, but got no response. Alarmed, she moved closer and lifted his head from the water.

The gunner, who had been shamming, peered at her beneath lowered lids—saw the consternation in her pretty face—saw her red lips so close to his. A maddening desire for them overcame him.

"Kantar!" she cried. "Oh, what have I done?"

Suddenly he swept her to him, crushed her lips to his.

She trembled there in his embrace for a moment, then broke from him, her face scarlet.

"You would dare!" she exclaimed. "Oh, you beast! You are worse than the Huitsenni, none of whom has ventured to so affront me."

"Narine," he pleaded, "I love you. I must tell you this before I go to my death at the hands of those yellow pirates, for they will surely slay me after what I have done. Your lips drew me—twin lodestones I could not resist. If you can not return my love, can you not at least forgive me?"

Her look softened. "The pirates have lowered a boat," she said, "so I must put maidenly modesty aside and answer you briefly and truthfully. I do love you, my brave gunner. I have loved you from the moment I first saw you, there in the cabin of the little fishing-boat. But even had I hope of life and freedom, I could never marry you."

"There is another man?"

"Yes. My father. He would never consent."

"Perhaps he could be brought to reason."

"Impossible. You see my older sister disappointed him in his plans for a matrimonial alliance, and fell in love with another man. She won her point with him, but he will not be turned again from his purpose. Her disappointed lover has agreed to solace himself with me. My father will not give in so easily a second time.

"But all this talk is futile. We are once more in the power of the Huitsenni, and only they may decide our fate. Here is the boat. Farewell, my gunner, and may Thorth guide and keep you."

"I'll never give you up," he cried.

Yellow hands seized them, dragged them into the boat. Then Kantar suddenly saw what he had had no opportunity to see before. When the boat had gone down, Narine's improvised cloak had floated from her. Later, all but her head, arms and shoulders had been under water. But now he observed that she wore the scarlet of royalty and on the golden plate which connected her two jeweled breast-shields he saw the insignia of an imperial princess of Tyrhana. All the hopes which her words had aroused died in his heart. For Kantar was but a common soldier. His father had been an officer in the Uxponian army, but without even the purple of nobility.

Narine saw the despair in his eyes and guessed his thoughts. She smiled, a little wistful smile.

"I understand, now," said the gunner. Then he resolutely turned his head away, and meekly permitted his captors to bind his wrists. A moment later, San Thoy also was dragged out of the water.

SWIFTLY the rowers propelled the boat back to the ship. The prisoners were hoisted aboard. Narine was hurried away by the mojak of the vessel. And with kicks and cuffs, Kantar and San Thoy, bound hand and foot, were thrown into an evil-smelling room in the hold, quite similar to the one in which they had been confined with Grandon when first taken to Huitsen. Immediately Kantar set about trying to loose the bonds of his companion.

But his tedious labors were suddenly interrupted by an explosion which tore a hole in the planking above their heads. There followed the rapid booming of mattorks, the screaming of projectiles, and the almost continuous bursting of shells.

"Our captors must have found new victims," said Kantar, springing to his feet.

"Judging by the number of shells which are striking this ship, I would say that they are more likely to become the victims," replied San Thoy, also getting to his feet.

Both men hopped to the side of the boat—they could not walk because of their bound feet—and peered through the loopholes.

"Bones of Thorth!" exclaimed San Thoy. "There are ships floating in the air!"

Looking out, Kantar saw a fleet of aerial battleships. They were shaped like duck-boats, surmounted by heavy transparent turrets mounting heavy mattorks, and flew without wings, rudders or propellers.

"They are Olban airships*," he said. "I once saw a fleet of them in Reabon."

"Never before have I seen or heard of such marvellous craft above the Azpok," said San Thoy.

"It's strange that they should be here. I wonder—ah! I have it. Zinlo, Torrogo of Olba, is the fiancé of Loralie, the Torrogina of Tyrhana. Naturally he would, on being advised of the disappearance of her younger sister, assist in the search for her. And just as naturally, he would attack the ships of the Huitsenni, who are enemies to all Zorovia, wherever he should find them."

For several minutes the bombardment became more intense, and Kantar was much concerned for Narine's safety. Then a huge shadow darkened the waters before them, the bombardment ceased, and there was the noise of grappling-hooks scraping across the splintered decks. These sounds were succeeded by the tramping of many feet above them, the clashing of arms intermingled with the spitting of tork fire, and a medley of shouts, groans and shrieks.

"The Olbans have boarded us," said Kantar. "I trust that they arrive in time to save Narine."

The fighting was soon over. Presently the gunner heard the tramp of warriors, evidently searching the ship, passing their door. "Ho, Olbans," he called, "open the door."

"Who is it?" a voice asked, cautiously.

"A warrior of Reabon and a fellow prisoner," he replied.

The door was unbolted and flung open. Three Olban warriors, with the muzzles of their torks elevated, peered in, while a fourth flashed a light about the room. Seeing the two bound men, they entered and quickly released them.

"Have they found the princess?" Kantar inquired, rubbing his numbed wrists. "Is she safe?"

"What princess?" asked the soldier who had removed his bonds. "We know naught of a princess."

"Why, Narine, Torrogini of Tyrhana,"

* The airships are levitated and projected by a mechanism which amplifies the power of telekineesis, that mysterious mind force which enables terrestrial mediums to lift and move tables and other ponderable objects without physical contact.

replied the gunner. "She was captured and brought aboard with us."

"Ha! It is as His Majesty suspected," cried another soldier. "From a distance we saw them sink a small boat, and later lower a boat to bring away three people from the wreckage. Yet their mojak has stoutly denied that he had prisoners aboard. Come. The Torrogo must hear of this at once."

With the four Olbans, they hurried to the deck. A group of Huitsenni prisoners huddled, weaponless, in the stern, under the watchful eyes of several guards. Warriors were heaving the bodies of the slain overboard, and Olban surgeons were tending the wounded, both friend and foe. Attached to the side of the vessel by hooks and chains was an immense aerial battleship with twelve gun-turrets. A set of collapsible aluminum stairs led from an open door in one of these turrets to the deck of the ship. On the opposite side another aerial battleship was similarly fastened. A fleet of a dozen more airships floated overhead, and Kantar saw that the other pirate ship had also been boarded by the crews of two aerial battleships, and its men subdued.

They hurried forward. On the foredeck stood a handsome young man of about the gunner's own age, whom Kantar instantly recognized as Zinlo, Torrogo of Olba. He was clad in scarlet apparel, gold-trimmed and glittering with precious stones. On his feet were sandals of soft frella hide, and his scarlet, turban-shaped headpiece was decked with gold fringe and set with a huge ruby that blazed above the center of his forehead. Beside him stood an equally youthful soldier, whose insignia proclaimed him Romojak of the Aerial Navies of Olba.

On his knees before the young Torrogo was the mojak of the vessel. As Kantar came up with the others he was saying: "I swear to you, Majesty, by the beard and body of Thorth, by all I hold sacred, that I have no prisoners, white or yellow, on board."

"So. You persist in your falsehood." Zinlo frowned at the yellow man who groveled before him. Then his eyes fell on Kantar and San Thoy.

"Whom have we here?" he asked one of the warriors who had released them.

The mojak looked around, and seeing who stood behind him, turned a pale, sickly yellow.

"They are two prisoners we found in a room below the deck, Your Majesty," replied the warrior.

Kantar made obeisance, with right hand extended palm downward.

"I am Kantar the Gunner, of Reabon, Your Majesty," he said, "and my companion is San Thoy, a former mojak in the navy of Huitsen. If you don't mind, I would prefer to tell you our story after Her Imperial Highness has been found."

"Her Imperial Highness?"

"I refer, Your Majesty, to Narine, Torrogini of Tyrhana."

"Ha!" Zinlo suddenly whipped out his scarbo and presented its point to the breast of the frightened mojak. "Now, you yellow hahoe, we have caught you lying. Either you will tell us, this instant, where the Princess is concealed, or I will slay you and if need be, tear this ship apart to find her."

"Mercy, Majesty! Have mercy!" quavered the mojak. "I will show you."

Rising, and backing away from the royal presence, he stooped and seized a ring in the deck. Pulling this, he lifted a trap-door from which a short ladder led down into a small cabin. Lying on the sleeping-shelf of the cabin was Narine, gagged, and bound hand and foot.

DISDAINING the ladder, Kantar dropped into the cabin, closely followed by the young Torrogo. Together they quickly unbound the princess and removed her gag. She was limp, and apparently lifeless.

"Narine! Narine!" For the moment Kantar, who had knelt beside the sleeping-shelf, forgot the presence of Zinlo of Olba—forgot that the girl before him was an imperial princess.

Narine opened her eyes and saw Kantar bending over her. But Zinlo she did not see. Her right arm went around the gunner's neck—her hand caressed his sandy hair. "I'm just a little faint, my gunner. That gag made breathing difficult. I could not have lasted much longer."

He caught up her left hand, lying limply beside her, and covered it with kisses. "I'm glad, so glad, we came in time."

"My lips, Gunner. Have they lost their allure so quickly?" She drew his face down to hers.

Zinlo raised a quizzical eyebrow. Then, with a fierce gesture, he waved off the gaping warriors who were peering down at them.

"I heard explosions—men fighting on the decks. Tell me what happened," said Narine, a moment later.

"His Imperial Majesty, Zinlo of Olba, rescued us," replied Kantar, suddenly remembering the presence of the Torrogo, and blushing furiously in consequence.

"What!" Narine sat up quickly, then, seeing Zinlo, turned to face him, her shapely legs dangling from the sleeping-shelf.

"Your Majesty!" she cried in consternation. "I did not know you were here."

She rose and made the customary obeisance.

"I surmised as much, Your Highness," smiled Zinlo. Then he took her extended hand, and kneeling, raised it to his lips. "Shall we adjourn to more comfortable quarters?"

"Let's. I've always wanted to ride in one of your Olban airships. What of my father and sister?"

"Both well, but almost frantic with worry on account of you."

When they reached the deck, the young romojak, who had been standing beside Zinlo when Kantar first saw him, came up and saluted.

"What is it, Lotar?" asked Zinlo.

"We have disposed of all the prisoners in accordance with Your Majesty's commands," replied the romojak. "There remains, however, the yellow man we found imprisoned with this warrior of Reabon."

"Take him aboard the flagship," said Zinlo, "and see that he has every comfort."

Lotar saluted and withdrew. Then the three climbed the aluminum stairs, and after passing through a narrow hallway, entered the luxurious saloon of Zinlo's flagship. The young Torrogo placed cushioned chairs for both of them, and summoned a slave. "Bring us kova," he commanded.

He drew up a chair and sat down. Then he noticed that Kantar, conforming to the usages of the court, had not seated himself because he was in the presence of royalty. "Sit, Gunner," he said. "We will have no formality here."

This was a command, and Kantar, whose feeling of embarrassment had only slightly lessened since the incident in the cabin, took the chair which had been placed for him.

The slave bustled in with kova, and Zinlo himself served his guests in tiny bowls of gold lined with mother of pearl.

"Now," he said, "as soon as my romojak comes aboard, we'll fly to the flagship

of Ad of Tryhana. But in the meantime, Your Highness, suppose you tell me what you have been doing these many days."

"My father's flagship!" exclaimed Narine. "Where is he?"

"Only a little way from here," replied Zinlo, "and Loralie is with him. But let's hear that story."

Swiftly, Narine sketched for him the story of her adventures—the storm, her capture by the Huitsenni, her sale to Heg and rescue by Kantar, and their escape with the aid of San Thoy.

Zinlo frowned. "These yellow pirates must be wiped out," he said, "and there is no better time than now to do it. But what of my friend Grandon and his beautiful bride?" he asked Kantar. "Do you think they were both carried off by the white-furred barbarians?"

"I think it probable," replied Kantar, "that Her Majesty was carried off by Heg. It is possible that the Ibbits also took Grandon prisoner, but I think it more probable that he found some way to follow the savages, in an effort to rescue his bride."

"I'll send a squadron after them," said Zinlo. "As I judge from what Her Highness just told me that the capital of the furry Rogo is five days' journey from Huitsen, my swift airships can easily overtake them before they reach their destination."

At this moment, Lotar came in and saluted.

"To the flagship of Ad of Tyrhana," commanded Zinlo. "Signal the fleet to attend us. You have placed the prize crews aboard the two pirate vessels?"

"Yes, Majesty." He saluted and withdrew.

A moment later the ship rose smoothly and swiftly to a height of about two thousand feet, then shot away toward the west at a tremendous speed. Kantar, who had never ridden in one of these craft before, but had heard that the swiftest ones were capable of traveling at the speed with which the planet revolved on its axis at the equator—approximately a thousand miles an hour—nevertheless marveled at the speed with which the ocean appeared to move beneath them as he watched through one of the side windows. Sailing on the waves of the Azpok he now saw six large battle fleets, all within a few miles of the spot where their little craft had been sunk by the Huitsenni.

THE airship reached a point over the flagship of one of these fleets and swiftly descended.

Narine placed a hand on Zinlo's arm. "You won't tell my father?" she asked.

"About what?" Zinlo appeared puzzled.

She looked tenderly at Kantar. "About us. We know it is hopeless, our love, and have agreed to—to——"

"Try to forget," suggested Zinlo.

"You're so helpful, my brother to be. But there in the cabin, for the moment, love mastered us."

"I understand, perfectly," said the young Torrogo.

"Of course. You and Loralie——"

"Exactly."

"But my father will not be moved from his purpose again. I know him well enough for that."

"Oh, I don't know. What has been done before can be done again. Perhaps I can do something."

"You are so kind. Now I know why Loralie just can't help loving you. But, for the present at least, you will say nothing."

"In that cabin, I was deaf, dumb and

blind, as were my warriors who happened to be peering down at us. But here we are at the flagship."

Kantar heard the clank of chains and the thud of grappling-irons. Then Zinlo rose, and they followed him down the ladder to the deck of an immense battleship which flew the flag of Ad, Torrogo of Tyrhana.

Just as they reached the deck, the gunner saw two people emerge from one of the cabins—a tall, straight, athletic-appearing man about forty years of age, with a square-cut, jet-black beard, and a girl who closely resembled Narine, though she appeared a trifle more mature. Both wore the scarlet of royalty, and Kantar knew that they must be Ad of Tyrhana and his daughter, Loralie.

Narine ran into the open arms of her father, then embraced her sister. All three shed tears of joy, and Kantar, whose own eyes were overflowing, saw that Zinlo was in like case.

The gunner was presented, and all were ushered into Ad's sumptuous cabin, where the customary kova was served.

After Narine had related the story of her adventures, Kantar was pressed to tell his, and those of Grandon and Vernia with which he was acquainted.

When the gunner had finished, Ad echoed the previously expressed sentiment of Zinlo. "We must wipe out the Huitsenni," he declared. "But first we must try to rescue Their Majesties of Reabon."

"I'm going to send a squadron after the Ibbits," said Zinlo.

"But suppose Grandon and his bride are still in Huitsen."

"I believe we can ascertain whether or not they are there," said Kantar.

"How?" asked Ad.

"The Chispoks. There must be some members among the pirates you have captured. Land some of them near the city under cover of darkness. Let them investigate, and report back to you."

"A splendid idea," said Zinlo. "And I would suggest a further plan. Suppose we form an alliance with the Chispoks, overthrow the present regime, if indeed they have not done so already, and put them in power. That would be better than indiscriminately wiping out the entire yellow race, all of whom are certainly not responsible for the piratical outrages of Yin Yin's men. The port of Huitsen could then be opened for peaceful trade with all Zorovia, and if the Huitsenni should ever again develop piratical leanings, we would know how to stop them."

"I'm sure the alliance can be arranged, Your Majesty," said Kantar. "Suppose we send for San Thoy."

Zinlo called a servant. "Tell my romojak to bring San Thoy, the yellow man, here," he directed.

In a few moments Lotar came in, accompanied by San Thoy. Kantar presented the former mojak of the navy of Huitsen to the assemblage. Then Zinlo addressed Lotar. Briefly he told him why they suspected that Grandon and Vernia might be traveling southward with a party of Ibbits, and gave him his instructions: "Dispatch six ships," he commanded, "with orders to fly high above Huitsen, deep enough in the first cloud stratum so they will not be seen from that city. Then, when they have their bearings, let them spread out, and fly southward until they come to a column of furry white savages riding on three-horned beasts. If Grandon of Terra and his bride are with this party they must rescue them as best they can, and bring them here at once."

Lotar saluted. "I hasten to carry out Your Majesty's commands," he replied, and hurried out.

As soon as Lotar had gone, San Thoy was quizzed about a possible alliance with the Chispoks. He not only felt positive that he could arrange this, but stated that he had received secret signs from several of the yellow sailors on board the vessel from which he had been rescued, which proved to him that they were members of the brotherhood. After a short conference, he was dispatched in one of Zinlo's airships to visit both captured pirate vessels and cull the Chispoks from among the prisoners.

"What of our allies?" Zinlo asked Ad, after San Thoy had departed. "Shall we let them help in the assault on Huitsen?"

Ad stroked his black beard thoughtfully. "Hum. Let's see. We have two squadrons here, of our own. Lying near by are two from Adonijar, and a little farther away, two from Reabon."

"In addition to their battleships, the Reabonians have two-score transports, and as many munition ships, with a large army and munitions and equipment for a land offensive," said Zinlo.

"I was thinking of that," said Ad. "How or where could they land their army?"

"The Chispoks know a secret way," said Kantar. "San Thoy or one of his fellows could guide them."

"Splendid. We can now plan a united offensive. The Reabonians will disembark at night, and guided by the Chispoks, will march on Huitsen, prepared for an offensive tomorrow at an hour we shall set. You, Zinlo, will mass your aerial battleships above the city to join in the attack at the same time, and to convey signals from one force to another. Meanwhile, the battleships of Tyrhana, Adonijar and Reabon must find some way to get through the secret entrance."

"I've thought of a plan for that, also, Your Majesty," said Kantar.

"Good. Let me hear it, my boy."

And so Kantar related to them a plan he had conceived on the spur of the moment, whereby he believed they could not only get the gates opened for them, but keep them open for the entrance of the battle fleets of the three great nations.

CHAPTER 17

THE DEATH SENTENCE

SOME time after Grandon and Vernia separated at the mouth of the cave to look for their riding-beasts which had disappeared, and which they believed had strayed in search of food, there came faintly to the ears of the Earth-man a sound that caused him to stop, whirl around, and listen intently. So slight was the sound that he could not quite make it out, yet it had a quality which made him suspicious that Vernia had called him. Though he strained his ears to catch a possible repetition, none was audible.

Alarmed, he retraced his steps as swiftly as possible, but the soft, newly fallen snow retarded his progress considerably. Fuming impatiently at the delay, he floundered past the mouth of the cave in which they had passed the night and anxiously took up Vernia's trail, shouting her name as he went. But there was no reply.

The tracks led him close to the irregular base of the cliff, and as Grandon stumbled around a bend, he saw the same sight which Vernia had beheld only a short time before, and which had led to her entrapment—a bristly white and green object curving outward from behind a projection, which looked like a segment of Zorovian cactus. Like her, he thought it part of some antarctic plant, and proceeded incautiously toward it. He came to a sudden pause, however, and presented the

spiral point of his lance, as the apparent segment resolved itself into one of the chelæ of an immense white scorpion, which shot out from behind the projection and charged swiftly toward him.

Pointing his lance, Grandon pulled back the lever which set the spiral head to whirling. Fearlessly, and without swerving or endeavoring to evade the weapon, the monster sprang at the Earth-man with its immense pincers extended to seize him. Right in the thorax the lance-point struck, and bored in up to the knob. Grandon was thrown backward by the impact of that charge, but by diverting the butt of his lance downward and plunging it through the snow until it struck the frozen ground beneath, was able to hold the scorpion away from him.

Then, still clinging to the shaft with his left hand, he drew his scarbo with his right and struck at the nearest chela. It was quite tough and horny, and the blade did not bite more than half-way through it. Clenching his teeth, he struck again with all his strength, and this time succeeded in severing it near the middle. Having mastered the art of it, he was able to cut off the other claw at the first joint with two sharp blows.

But no sooner had these menaces been removed than he was threatened with another, even more dangerous. With lightning swiftness, the monster suddenly elevated its long, jointed tail, and stabbed at him with the terrible telson with which the tip was armed.

Avoiding the deadly thrust of the poison sting by leaning sideways, Grandon hacked at the thing with his scarbo. To his surprize, it was quite brittle, and broke off with the first blow.

Although the monster was now unable to injure him except at very close quarters, it was not without resource. It suddenly reached beneath its abdomen with its foremost pair of hairy legs, and drawing therefrom a section of gleaming, sticky web as thick as a rope, it cast a loop about him and dragged him forward. He clung to the lance-shaft with all his might, and succeeded in severing the sticky loop with a stroke of his scarbo. Not so a second loop, however, which it unexpectedly flung around him, breaking his hold on the shaft, as it jerked him toward its ugly gaping mandibles with his right arm bound to his side.

He had previously refrained from using his tork for fear the sound would bring enemies, but in this extremity he elevated the muzzle, depressed the firing-button, and sent a stream of bullets straight into the gaping jaws. With muffled detonations, the projectiles exploded in the huge, armored body. A half-dozen of them sufficed to blow the hard-shelled cephalothorax to bits, and reduced the segmented abdomen to a shapeless quivering mass.

Quickly shifting his scarbo to his left hand, Grandon cut himself free of the sticky loop that encumbered him. Then, perceiving the yawning cave mouth, and suspecting that it was here that Vernia had been taken, he rushed inside. Despite their wrappings, he was able to identify the two zandars, one hanging in the center of the huge web, the other at the edge beside a large spherical cocoon. But what was that smaller object beside the cocoon? His heart stood still as he recognized the slender form of Vernia, and saw that a young scorpion, which had evidently just emerged from the cocoon, was crawling toward her.

Although the newly hatched monster was not more than six feet from Vernia, and he could not shoot without endangering her, he knew that there was nothing

else to do. Accordingly, he brought his tork to bear on the hairy youngster, and fired. There was a muffled explosion, and the menace was removed. But now he saw another pair of chelæ emerging from the cocoon. Again he fired, and the second young scorpion was blown to bits. He watched for a moment, but as no more appeared, decided that the other eggs had not yet hatched, and set about trying to find a way to climb to where Vernia was suspended.

The stickiness of the web made this almost impossible, until he thought to utilize the dust and debris which littered the floor. Catching this up in double handfuls, he flung it against the section of the web which he wished to climb, and found, as he had hoped, that it prevented the adhesive surface of the strands from clinging to his hands and feet.

Swiftly he climbed up to Vernia, cut the surrounding strands, and as swiftly descended to the floor with his burden. With his knife he quickly slit open the wrappings and found his wife, limp, and apparently lifeless. He opened her great fur cloak, and the sight of several scratches on her white skin engendered the fear that she had been poisoned by the venom of the monster. But when he held his ear to her breast, he was relieved to hear her heart beating.

With a handful of snow taken from the cave mouth, he touched her temples. The cold shock revived her. She looked about wildly for a moment; then, recognizing Grandon, she relaxed contentedly in his arms.

"Are you hurt, dear?" he asked.

"Only a few scratches, Bob," she replied. "It was the fright that made me swoon. When I saw that young strid coming toward me, as I hung there helpless, and realized that its purpose was to devour me, I fainted. Let me rest for a little while, and I'll be ready to walk."

"Perhaps you won't need to walk," said Grandon. "One zandar appears to be alive. I'll see if I can cut it down."

Utilizing the dust as he had done before, Grandon succeeded in making a path up the web for himself to where the zandar hung beside the immense cocoon. With his scarbo he first cut the heavy, rope-like strands above it. Then, as the great bulk of the beast swung downward, he cut the cross strands in succession, and with each cut, the zandar descended a little further. When at last the beast was on the floor, it was still helpless because of the thorough manner in which it had been trussed. But its heaving flanks showed that it was still very much alive and not a little frightened by the experience it had just gone through. Employing his knife, Grandon quickly cut the strands which held it, and it struggled to its feet, trembling and panting heavily.

"It seems unhurt," said Vernia, who had recovered from her faintness and come over to watch the proceedings.

"Its legs are sound, at any rate," replied Grandon.

THE beast followed them docilely enough through the mouth of the cave. Then, after helping Vernia into the saddle, Grandon returned for a moment, to apply his flame-maker to the bottom of the web. It caught fire with a roar, and he plunged out of the cave followed by a billowing cloud of black, oily smoke.

"That will do for the rest of the ugly brood," he said as he came up beside Vernia.

He was about to mount behind her, when he suddenly saw, riding swiftly toward them, a large band of warriors mounted on zandars. They were not Ibbits, as he could see at a glance, but Huit-

senni, and had evidently heard his tork fire and come to investigate. Instantly the riders deployed in a wide semicircle, cutting off all possibility of escape across the snow. As they could not climb the sheer face of the cliff behind them, nor retire into the cave, which was now belching great clouds of acrid smoke, they remained where they were, Vernia still in the saddle and Grandon beside her.

Had he been alone, Grandon would have resisted desperately, but he knew that if he should use his tork the enemy would retaliate in kind, and Vernia might be injured or slain. A moment more, and he was looking into the mouths of fully a hundred torks leveled at him by a closely packed semicircle of riders. Then the mojak in command ordered a halt, and called out to Grandon: "Surrender, in the name of the Rogo of Huitsen, or we fire."

Seeing that resistance was useless, Grandon unbuckled the belt which contained his weapons and flung it on the snow in front of him. Then he clasped his hands behind his head in token of surrender.

At the order of the mojak, two men descended and swiftly bound him, hand and foot. Then he was slung across the saddle-bow of one of the riders as if he had been a sack of grain, and the cavalcade rode away. Vernia was not bound but was permitted to retain her place in the saddle with a guard on each side of her.

Several hours later it seemed to Grandon that all of Huitsen had turned out to stare at the two prisoners that their riders were bringing in, so dense were the crowds along the streets. Their captors took them straight to the palace, where they were deprived of their Ibbit furs, which were not needed here in the warm lowlands. Then the mojak, quite obviously proud of his success, led them to the throne room, each guarded by two of his warriors.

Up to the time they were ushered into that vast room, Grandon had entertained the hope that one of the Chispoks had succeeded Yin Yin, but his hopes were dashed as he recognized the individual who squatted in the center of the crystal throne. It was the bestial Thid Yet, former Romojak of the Navies of Huitsen. Like his predecessor, he was surrounded by numerous attendants and nobles, and his gross body was loaded with flashing jewels. The porcine monarch grinned toothlessly as they were brought before him.

"It is apparent that our men have persuaded Your Majesties to avail yourselves once more of our cordial if humble hospitality," he said. "We are honored."

"Your Majesty's warriors have persuasive ways," replied Grandon. "Perhaps, now that you are Rogo, we can persuade you to permit us to depart to our own torrogat, where duty calls us."

"Perhaps," replied Thid Yet, dipping his thumb into a spore-pod which one of the former slave-girls of Yin Yin presented, and thrusting the red spores into his fat cheek. "Just what is your proposition?"

"Say, a million keds of gold."

"Humph! We are offered more for Her Majesty alone."

"Two million."

"Not enough."

"Three——"

"Wait," interrupted Thid Yet. "You but waste your breath. Her Majesty will remain here as was previously arranged, until it is time to take her to the rendezvous. Though she has been deprived of the pleasure of Yin Yin's company, we trust that we will make a satisfactory substitute."

"Why you——!" Grandon would have sprung at the throat of the man on the throne had he not been seized by the guards.

"One moment, Majesty. Permit me to finish. We are grieved that we can not entirely comply with your request, yet we will in part fulfill it."

"In part?"

"Yes. We will permit you to leave, but not for your own country. Although you left no witnesses, we have considerable evidence that it was you who beheaded our just and generous predecessor. We also remember that it was due to you that we nearly lost our own head. So we will allow you to leave—will, in fact, speed you on your way, for it would be dangerous to have you near us. But instead of sending you to your own torrogat, we will dispatch you to the Kingdom of Thorth.*"

He beckoned to one of the two brawny guards who stood behind the throne leaning on their immense two-handed scarbos. "Come, Ez Ben. Clip me the head from this fine fellow, and see that you cut it cleanly, as I would retain it for a souvenir."

Swinging his heavy scarbo to his shoulder, the headsman marched forward. Grandon's two guards quickly forced him to his knees. Ez Bin took a position beside him, tested the keenness of his blade with his thumb, and carefully measured the distance and position of Grandon's neck, closing one eye and squinting the other. Then, with the swift assurance of an expert, he raised his blade.

Vernia, who had been watching the scene, too horrified even to utter a sound, covered her eyes with her hands. Then she suddenly went limp in the hands of her two guards.

* Heaven.

CHAPTER 18

THE ALLIES ATTACK

IN THE flagship of Zinlo of Olba rode Kantar the Gunner and Narine, looking down at the city of Huitsen through several feet of the lowest cloud stratum. The ship was flying in this stratum that it might remain invisible to the Huitsenni in the streets below, yet be able to keep watch. The offensive which the allies had planned the day before was now scheduled to take place.

Ten thousand of Reabon's brave warriors, guided by the Chispoks that San Thoy had selected, were converging on the city in an immense semicircle, and five thousand more, a contingent of Reabonian artillery, had their mattorks ready to make breaches in the walls and lay a barrage in front of the infantry as soon as the charge should commence or the enemy discover their presence.

Zinlo, who had been looking over the scene with his glass, said: "I wonder what has become of San Thoy and the two pirate vessels he was so positive he could bring through the gate. I see no sign of them in the canal. And our fleets still ride at anchor outside, waiting for our signal."

"Perhaps we should fly down and investigate," suggested Narine.

"Hardly," replied Kantar. "They would be sure to see us and precipitate a battle before we are ready."

"There's nothing to do but wait," said Zinlo, impatiently.

MEANWHILE San Thoy, standing in the commander's cabin of the foremost of the two ships which had been converted to the purpose of the allies, its crew augmented by a band of Reabonian warriors who kept out of sight below decks, and which was just then entering

the fiord which led to Huitsen, was issuing swift orders to the mojak of the vessel. "Put three men on each oar," he commanded. "The steel bar which we are to drop between the stone gates to prevent their closing after us, is dragging on the bottom."

"Can we not raise it a trifle?" asked the mojak.

"No, idiot. The guardians are already watching us. To touch those chains now would make them suspicious. Do as I say, and quickly, for the time for the offensive is almost at hand."

Under the added propulsion of the extra rowers, the boat moved slowly forward, dragging the heavy steel bar which the smiths of the fleet of Reabon had forged especially for this occasion by working all the previous night. Behind it came the second pirate ship, manned like the first by Chispoks culled from the two crews and a concealed contingent of Reabonian warriors. Its mojak, puzzled by the slow progress of the ship ahead, ordered his rowers to back water and wait until a suitable distance should be established between the two ships.

As San Thoy's vessel approached the massive stone gates, they did not open. Instead, there came a hail from one of the guardians.

"What ails you? Why do you move so slowly?"

"We were crippled in a battle with the Reabonian fleet," replied San Thoy. "Our hold is filling with water. Let us through quickly or we will sink and block the channel."

There was some delay. Evidently the guardians were not entirely satisfied with San Thoy's explanation. The mojak knew that they were being subjected to minute scrutiny from above.

"Fools!" he cried, at length. "Open the gate or the channel will be closed to all our ships. We are sinking rapidly. Besides, the enemy follows closely. Would you have them find us here?"

Evidently his words, or the fact that their rigging and upper works were damaged by shell-fire, decided the guardians, for the gates slowly slid apart.

San Thoy snapped an order to the rowers. "Pull, men, with all your might."

The channel was quite shallow here, and the bar dragged heavily, but the men worked with a will. Soon the boat was half through the gateway. "Now," commanded San Thoy, "let go the bar."

The chains were released, and struck the water with a loud splash.

"Ho, sailors. What was that you dropped?" one of the guards shouted from above.

Freed from the heavy drag of the bar, the ship shot forward under the exertions of the rowers. At the same time, its mattorks were trained on the grotto above, where the guards manipulated the machinery that worked the gates and kept watch for ships. Without replying to the question of the guard, the Chispoks opened fire.

The guards were sheltered behind a wall of stone, and in addition, were armed with mattorks. These instantly went into action, replying to the guns of San Thoy's ship and riddling her upper works with shells.

The second ship had, meanwhile, come up more slowly. Warriors clung to her masts and rigging. As she came half-way through the gate, she dropped anchor. The men in the rigging flung grappling-hooks up over the walls, and swarmed up the ropes. Many were hurled back, but enough succeeded in getting over to quickly conquer the guards. Then a mojo with twenty men took charge of the gate, and the two ships passed on through the immense black cavern.

Swiftly San Thoy ran to the foredeck of his craft. With an immense brush and a can of red pigment, he painted the word "open" in patoa, so it could be seen from the air. A moment later his craft nosed out into the canal. He dropped anchor about five hundred feet from the mouth of the cave and waited. Presently the other ship came up and anchored behind him.

A mojak with a company of warriors, whose duty it was to patrol the canal bank, came hurrying up and hailed him.

"What was the firing?" he asked.

"We were pursued by the Reabonians," San Thoy replied. "They nearly had us. We just got through the gates in time."

"But did they not see the gates? Perhaps the secret way is not known to them."

"Perhaps," agreed San Thoy.

"You have lied to me," accused the mojak. "That firing was inside the cave."

"Go and see for yourself," suggested San Thoy.

"I will. Let me take a boat."

"Not you. You are too uncivil."

"Then I'll take one by force."

"Try it." San Thoy waved his hand, and fully two-score mattorks were trained on the mojak and his warriors. At this, the officer turned and whispered to a fat mojo who stood beside him. The fellow evidently counseled retreat, for they turned and marched away, leaving only a dozen men to watch the ships.

"They go to warn the city," said San Thoy's mojo.

"What odds?" replied San Thoy. "The romojak will order an investigation. A body of troops will be mobilized and marched back here. By that time our allies will have arrived, and the Reabonian army will be storming the city. Zinlo must have seen our signal, long since, and notified the fleets of Reabon, Tyrhana and Adonijar."

ZINLO, in his aerial battleship, had ordered his commander to soar to the southeast of the city of Huitsen. They were hovering just above the ship canal. Kantar and Narine were watching the landscape below through one of the keel windows.

"Look!" cried Narine. "A ship is coming out of the cave."

Zinlo, who had been consulting with Lotar, seized his glasses and leveled them on the ship.

"It's San Thoy," he announced, "and the way is open. To the flagship of Ad, Lotar."

The ship shot forward with a tremendous burst of speed. In less than a minute it was far out over the Azpok, where the ships of the allies waited. The foremost of these was the flagship of Ad of Tyrhana.

With a swiftness that made Kantar's ears ring, the airship dropped. It came to a stop beside Ad's flagship as lightly as if it had fallen into a bed of thistledown.

Zinlo opened a side door. Not twenty feet from him, Ad stood on the foredeck of his fighting-craft.

"The way is open," announced the Prince of Olba.

"Good! I'll see you in the palace of Huitsen," replied Ad. Then he waved his hand to a sailor, who instantly ran a pennant to the masthead. Almost immediately, similar flags were hoisted by the other ships, showing that they had caught the signal. Then the sails were unfurled, and with the assistance of a swift landward breeze, the allied flotillas rapidly made their way toward the secret entrance to Huitsen.

Once more the flagship of Zinlo darted

back above the city, this time just over the lowest cloud stratum. Here the air fleet of Olba hovered, waiting orders. The Torrogo's signal man stood forth on the deck just in front of the forward turret. In his right hand he held an immense red disk, and in his left, a yellow. He began making motions with one, then the other, then both, repeating them in numerous combinations which were evidently understood by the mojaks of the other battleships, as they immediately moved from their places and formed an immense circle which corresponded to the circumference of the city beneath. There they hovered, awaiting further orders.

Zinlo's own ship dropped once more into the lowest cloud stratum, high enough to be out of sight, but low enough so that he could watch developments. Presently another ship dropped down beside him. He opened a side door, and the commander of the ship did likewise.

"What news?" asked Zinlo.

"We caught up with the column of Ibbits, Your Majesty," replied the mojak. "Their Majesties of Reabon were not with them. The officer in command swore that Grandon of Terra had slain their Rogo and ridden away with his wife. He said they would have followed, but a blizzard obliterated the trail, so they decided to continue southward, bearing the body of their Rogo."

"Then what did you do?"

"We circled the snowy plain in all directions, and presently found a trail. From the tracks and the kerra juice which spattered the snow, we knew it was the trail of a party of Huitsenni, mounted on zandars. It led us to the mouth of a cave, before which an enormous white strid lay dead. Inside the cave we found the smoldering remains of a web, the charred carcasses of three young strids, and a number of charred eggs.

"On coming out, however, we noticed and followed another trail, which led from a near-by cave. It was the trail of a man and woman. They had not returned to the cave from which they had come, neither were their remains in the cave of the strid; so we judged they had been captured by the party of mounted Huitsenni. The fact that the return trail of the yellow men led straight back to the city confirmed our belief."

"You have done well," said Zinlo. "Now take your squadron and get into the formation above. I'll signal you when to descend." He closed the door.

Kantar, who had been listening to the conversation, said: "Your Majesty, I have a favor to ask."

"Name it," replied Zinlo. "You will deserve any favor within my power to confer."

"I would be set on one of the balconies of the palace of Huitsen, with two men to assist me."

"Impossible," replied Zinlo. "Our plans would be betrayed, and we would lose every advantage which a surprize attack would bring us."

"I am convinced, Majesty," said Kantar, "that Their Majesties of Reabon are prisoners in the palace. Grandon of Terra slew Yin Yin, Rogo of Huitsen. Under the circumstances, Yin Yin's successor can not do less than order his execution. Perhaps he has already done so, in which event I shall be too late. But I would be there to prevent it, if I can."

"What could three men do?"

"If I could reach one of the inner balconies that overlook the throne room, with a man or two to guard my back and a tork in my hands, I could do much."

"You are right, Gunner. A tork in your hands is worth a hundred in the hands of ordinary men. And, after all, we're more anxious to save Grandon and

Vernia than to take the city." He called to Lotar. "Send me two warriors. Then you will drop suddenly beside one of the outer balconies of the palace. As soon as the warriors have disembarked, you will swiftly return to this position."

"I hear and obey," replied Lotar.

Zinlo's orders were swiftly carried out.

Kantar bent over Narine's hand, but she snatched it free, and threw her arms around his neck.

"It may be that you go to your death, my brave gunner," she cried. "Hold me tight. Tell me again that you love me."

Zinlo halted the two warriors in the doorway. Then he coughed discreetly.

"We have arrived at the palace, Gunner. Come quickly, or we shall be shot down."

A side door was flung open. Her eyes sparkling with love and pride, Narine watched Kantar and the two warriors leap to the balcony. Then the door was closed, and before a single enemy mattork could be trained on it, the ship shot aloft and disappeared in the clouds.

Hovering there in the lower cloud stratum, Zinlo kept his glasses focused on the canal. Presently he cried: "There is Ad's flagship. Another follows, and another. It is time for the offensive."

He turned and gave swift orders to Lotar. The flagship rose above the first cloud stratum where the fleet waited, still in circular formation. The signal man flashed his red and yellow disks. Then Zinlo's ship took a place in the circle and began spiraling downward. Behind it followed the entire air fleet.

As soon as the flagship was through the lower cloud stratum, its keel mattorks went into action. The mattorks of the fleet instantly followed suit. There was a burst of flame from the ground beneath them as the Reabonian artillery opened fire, and great breaches began appearing in the city walls.

Then a long shout went up, and the long line of Reabonian infantry, which had been waiting in hiding, sprang forward, the light glinting from the barrels of its torks, and from its scarbos and long-bladed spears.

The ship canal was now filled with enemy vessels, following one another in close formation. Entering the land-locked harbor were the two captured pirate vessels—the first commanded by San Thoy.

The vessels which were anchored in the harbor immediately opened fire, concentrating on these two ships. San Thoy's vessel was riddled by shell-fire and began to sink rapidly. He instantly ran it up beside an anchored vessel, and leading his mixed crew of white and yellow warriors, boarded the new craft. Only a few sailors were aboard, and these were quickly cut down.

IN THE meantime, the mighty flagship of Ad of Tyrhana had nosed into the harbor. The withering blasts from its heavy mattorks literally blew some of the smaller pirate craft out of the water, and wrought havoc with the larger vessels.

It was closely followed by the huge flagships of Reabon and Adonijar, whose powerful mattorks were equally efficient. And close on the heels of these crowded the battleships of the allied fleet.

One by one, every pirate vessel that offered resistance was sunk or captured. Soon the allies were in complete command of the harbor. This accomplished, they landed warriors under cover of a heavy barrage, took the docks and warehouses with virtually no resistance, and marched into the city.

In the meantime, the Reabonian infantry was meeting with desperate resistance

around the city walls. Time and again, Grandon's brave warriors charged into the breaches made by their artillery, only to be hurled back by the desperate defenders.

Presently, however, a contingent of fighting Traveks, Grandon's fierce warriors from the mountain fastnesses of Uxpo, broke through and charged straight for the palace.

The commander of the Huitsenni had anticipated just such an emergency, and was prepared to meet it. Mounted on zandars, firing their torks and brandishing their heavy scarbos, a yelling horde of reserves thundered straight at the charging Traveks.

The Uxponian mountaineers in the first line instantly knelt and presented their long-bladed spears, while their comrades immediately behind them fired over their heads at the swiftly approaching enemy. The two forces met with a terrific shock in which tough spear-shafts were splintered, scarbos flashed, and torks spat incessantly. In an instant the first line was a bloody shambles of dead and wounded men and zandars. At this point, wave after wave met, until the pile of dead, inextricably mingled with wounded men and maimed and struggling beasts, was so high that neither side could advance, both using it as a rampart over which to fire their torks.

The Reabonians, however, fighting shoulder to shoulder with their Uxponian brothers on either side, had quickly widened the breach made by the Traveks. Now they, too, charged into the city, soon enveloping the mounted Huitsenni until all chance of retreat for the yellow cavalry was lost. Seeing that further resistance was hopeless, they threw down their arms, and clasped their hands behind their heads in token of surrender.

Leaving a few of their comrades to guard the prisoners and aid the wounded, the Traveks again charged forward with the Reabonians, helping to drive the yellow infantry toward the palace. "For Grandon and Vernia!" they shouted. "Down with Huitsen!"

From beyond the palace, a tremendous cheer answered them, as the allied warriors from the battleships drove the Huitsenni back.

While his keel mattorks kept up a continuous bombardment of the yellow army beneath, Zinlo watched these beginnings of victory with satisfaction. Then he suddenly saw that for which he had been waiting. Out from those buildings surrounding and closest to the palace, and from the fishing-holes in the vicinity, there poured a swarm of Huitsenni, armed and dressed like the others, with the exception that each man wore a white scarf knotted around his neck and thrown over his shoulders.

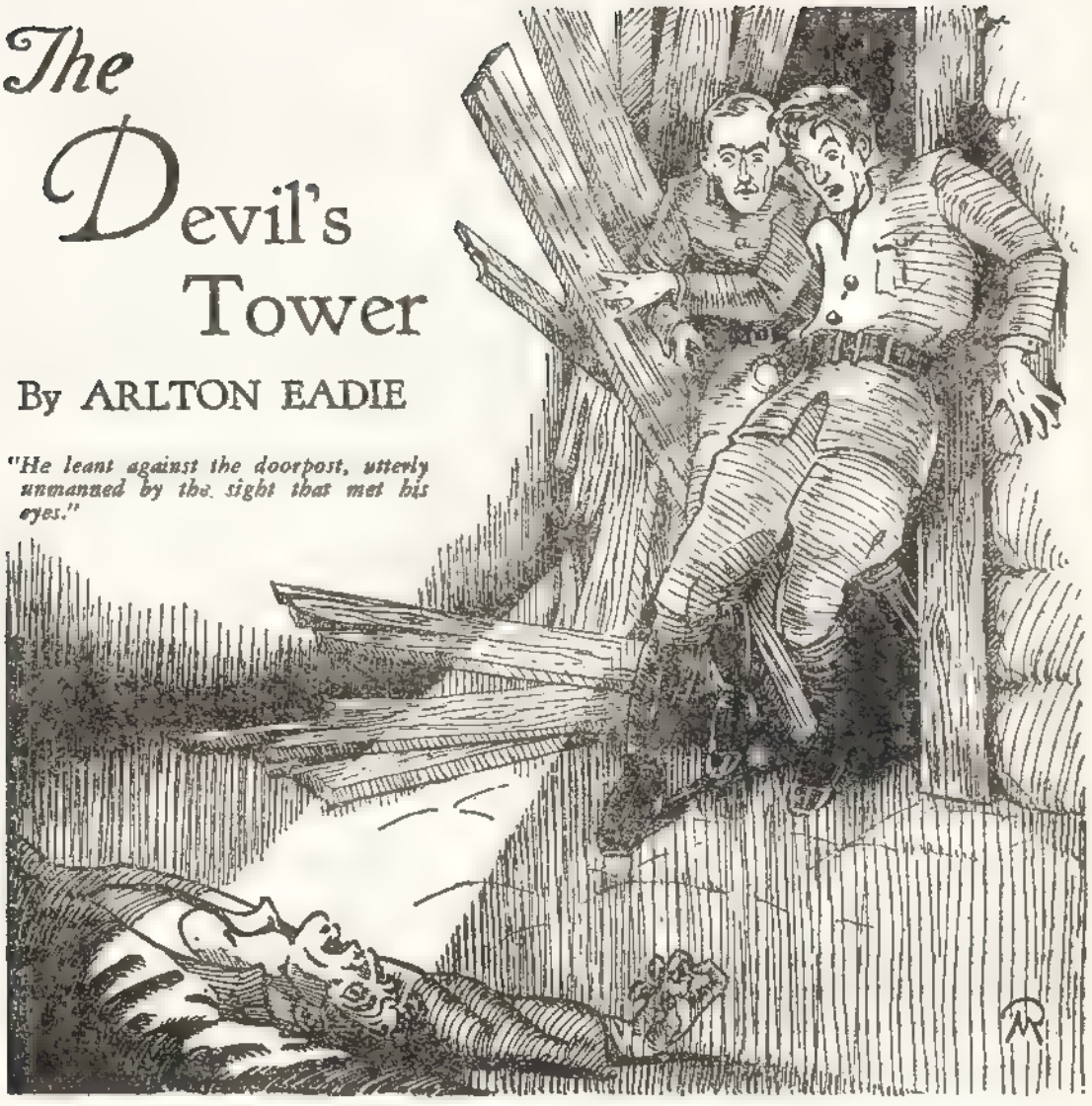
Part of this new force charged straight for the palace, and the remainder formed a great skirmish line to cut off the approach of the retreating Huitsenni.

"It's the Chispoks!" cried Zinlo. "To the palace, Lotar."

The fleets of the allies and the powerful air navy of Olba unite in their final effort to crush the power of the buccaneers, while Grandon battles desperately for his life and the honor of his lovely bride in the palace of Huitsen. Read the smashing denouement to this thrill-packed tale in the April issue of WEIRD TALES, on sale March 1st

The Devil's Tower

By ARLTON EADIE



"He leant against the doorpost, utterly unmanned by the sight that met his eyes."

A startling tale of the Tower of London, haunted by the ghosts of dead conspirators

THE Tower of London! Every student of history must be acquainted, by repute at least, with that ancient stronghold which rears its gray, many-turreted head on the north bank of the River Thames, seeming still to be keeping watch and ward over the great city which stretches on every side as far as the eye can reach.

Figuring at different times as British earthwork, Roman fortress, Plantagenet palace, and Tudor prison, its time-stained walls have echoed to the din of war, the trumpet-blast of proud chivalry, the mirth of kingly revels, the sighs of languishing captives, and the groans of the hapless victims of "foul and midnight murder." Its history is the history of England itself, for few indeed are the events recorded therein in which it has not played its part.

Yet, in spite of its interesting associations, it was with very mixed feelings that I learnt, in February, 1917, that I was to have the privilege of residing within its

walls. Like so many other mounted regiments during that time of national emergency, my unit, the Honorable Artillery Company, had been converted into infantry, and as such had been ordered to relieve the Guards' battalion which then formed the garrison of the Tower.

Of course, this does not imply that the military authorities contemplated utilizing the old relic as a part of the defenses of the capital. Formidable though the massive walls may have been in the age in which they were built, a modern howitzer battery could have shelled the whole place into a heap of rubble for an afternoon's practise. From time immemorial it had been the custom to keep an armed force there; and so, when we marched in and took possession with much pomp and ceremony, we were but carrying on the tradition which had existed from pre-Norman times. We were the legitimate successors to the mail-clad billmen and bowmen who had fought at Agincourt and Crecy, the dour Puritan pikemen of Cromwell's day, and the red-coated grenadiers from whose bayonets Napoleon's Old Guard had recoiled at Waterloo.

It would be invidious for me to express an opinion as to why our particular unit was selected for this honor, but I do not think I will be accused of undue *esprit de corps* when I describe the Honorable Artillery Company as a crack regiment. Professional men, artists, actors, men of letters, together with a fair sprinkling of college undergraduates, formed the bulk of the rank and file, and I must admit that they proved themselves a remarkably efficient and well-disciplined body of men. Considering that nearly everybody was keen on getting a commission (the other units used to call us the "Unofficial Officers' Training Corps"), it is scarcely surprizing that crime—I use the word in its military sense—was almost non-existent among us. There was but one blot on our fair fame in this respect, and that was Private Michael Maloney.

BY WHAT series of mischances Maloney managed to find his way into the H. A. C. is a problem that I have never been able to solve. He had previously served in France with the Royal Munsters, and had there behaved with such gallantry that he had been awarded the Military Medal and promoted to the rank of sergeant. Then he had been wounded, sent to England, and then—probably at the instigation of some well-meaning "brass hat" who thought thereby to enhance Maloney's prospects of further promotion—transferred to us. As it turned out, this was about the worst thing that could have happened to him. Rough, uneducated, though with a heart of sterling gold and as brave a soldier as one would wish to command, poor Maloney was like a fish out of water among the rather high-toned company in which he found himself. Being unable to live up to his new surroundings, he took to seeking his diversions among the rather questionable characters who at that time were always to be found not far away from a military station, and who were only too willing to help him get rid of his pay in the local public-houses. Troubles soon began to accumulate around his not over-intelligent head. He became slack in his duties and slovenly on parade; and—an unpardonable offense in war time—began to allow his hours of alcoholic indulgence to encroach on his hours of duty.

First he lost the stripes he had so bravely won at Ypres; then he was initiated into the irksome mysteries which are indicated by the letters C.B.; finally figuring in a general court-martial, by which he was awarded twenty-eight days' detention in "the clink."

"He's getting to be a positive disgrace to the regiment," Major Faversham, the adjutant, said to me as we sat together in the smoke-room of the Mess. "And the funny part about it is that he had an exemplary record-sheet before he came to us."

I nodded in agreement. Much as I liked the erring Irishman, the fact of his numerous sentences spoke for itself. "Still," I added, "there must be some reason at the back of it all. A good soldier does not suddenly start going wrong for nothing."

For a few moments Major Faversham sat smoking thoughtfully; then he sprang to his feet.

"You're right," he cried, "and I'm determined to get to the bottom of the matter. I just hate to see a promising man going to the bad as he's going. I'll have him up here for a friendly, informal chat, and talk to him like a father."

Considering that Maloney stood six feet in his socks and was built in proportion, the major's observation was not without its humorous side. But I managed to keep a straight face, and merely asked:

"Do you wish me to be present, sir?"

"Yes, I think it would be better. You're his company commander, and I've noticed that he seems to have rather a liking for you. You may be able to suggest something."

APPARENTLY the orderly who was sent to round up the black sheep had no difficulty in locating his quarry. In a few minutes Maloney entered, clicked his heels smartly as he came to the salute, and remained standing stiffly to attention, his features frozen into that wooden, blank-eyed expression that all good soldiers are apt to assume in the presence of their superior officer.

"Now, Maloney," said the major, suiting the action to the word, "I'm going to take off my tunic."

"Yis, sor." Maloney answered in his rich brogue. Except that his eyes opened a trifle wider, he showed no surprize at Faversham's unusual behavior.

"Can you guess why I've done that?" the major asked as he tossed his discarded coat and Sam-Browne belt on the couch.

"Oi can not, sor."

"It's because I want you to look on me for the next half-hour or so, not as your superior officer, but as a human being like yourself. You needn't stand there as if you're on 'general inspection.' Sit yourself down and try one of these cigarettes. I'm going to talk to you like a father."

"Oi niver knew my father, sor——"

"You're going to know one now, Maloney. Sit down. And now," he went on when Maloney had reluctantly and uneasily lowered his bulk into one of the easy-chairs, "what about it, eh?"

"About phwat, sor?" asked the wondering private.

"About the way you've been carrying on lately. Aren't you about tired of doing C.B. and pack-drill? What about keeping straight for a bit of a change?"

It was evident that Faversham had carefully rehearsed his speech, for he reeled it off with the breathless eloquence of a sergeant-instructor detailing "Slope arms by numbers." During the oration I stole a glance into the face of the man for whose benefit it was being delivered, and I was rejoiced to see, by the uneasy shuffling of his feet and the embarrassed blush on his open and ingenuous countenance, that the major's good seed was not falling on stony ground. By the time the peroration had come to an end—it was an appeal to save the good name of the regiment, such as no soldier can listen to unmoved—poor Maloney was almost reduced to tears.

"Oi know it's all thrue, sor, ivvery

worrd uv it," he said dolefully. "Oi know it's worse than a baste Oi am whin Oi've taken dhrink. But Oi can't help getting dhrunk, and that's the honest truth, sor—at least not whoile Oi'm living in this disthressing ould place."

I raised my eyebrows at this. "Is there anything wrong with your quarters?" I asked.

"Oh, they're comfortable enough, sor," he admitted readily. "It's the place itself. Faith, nivver a minute's pace of moind have Oi had at all since the moment Oi came here. It's haunted, the place is, sor!"

"Haunted?" I felt inclined to laugh, but the intense, almost pathetic earnestness with which he made the statement caused me to refrain. "Who's been telling you that nonsense?"

"Nivver a soul said a worrd, sor. It's what Oi've seen wid me own eyes."

I LOOKED at him curiously before replying. He was of that dark-haired, dark-eyed type of Irish which one occasionally encounters among the coast-dwellers of Munster and Connaught. In features and complexion strongly resembling the natives of southern Europe, their presence among a light-haired population has long been a puzzle to ethnologists; so much so, indeed, that they have been forced to adopt the theory that they are the descendants of the soldiers and mariners of the Spanish Armada, the bulk of whose ships were wrecked on that rock-bound coast. But, be his ancestry what it might, there could be not the slightest doubt but that he was in deadly earnest in his assertion that the Tower was haunted. I allowed no inkling of my real feelings to show as I asked carelessly:

"And what have you seen, Maloney?"

"Things that didn't ought to be seen at all, sor—things that aren't of this world," was his hushed answer. "Aye—and Oi heerd 'em, too! Didn't Oi, whin shovelling the colonel's coal into thim dungeons ahint the Boochump Tower, didn't Oi hear the groans of the poor divils that had been imprisoned there, maybe hunnerds of years ago? Didn't Oi hear the clank of their chains and their prayers to be put out of their misery? Whin Oi mounted guard at noight, on the path by the Traitors' Gate, didn't Oi see a boat row up where there was niver a dhrop of water, and the prisoners come up the steps? Didn't Oi hear the muffled tolling of the bell when Oi saw the little percession make its way to the railed-off spot near the chapel, wid a man carrying a whacking great ax on his shoulder lading the way? Oi tell ye, sor, what Oi've seen since Oi've been here is enough to sind anybody on the dhrink!"

During this extraordinary recital I caught Major Faversham's eyes fixed on mine with a quizzical, half-humorous expression. It was clear that Maloney's novel explanation of his lapses had taken him by surprize, and, recalling the major's oft-expressed disbelief in things supernatural, I surmised that it obtained scant credence in his mind. But with me it was otherwise. At that time I had not, it is true, any settled opinions regarding the possibility or otherwise of spirits from another sphere revisiting the earth. But I was intensely interested in the subject; and here, ready to hand, was a case which might possibly repay investigation.

After all, I argued to myself, mediumship is not confined to the educated classes. If one could credit the utterances of eminent spiritualists, the gift might be possessed—sometimes quite unknowingly—by those in the humblest walks of life. Might not this man, rude and unlettered though he was, yet have that mysterious psychic power of perceiving things invisible to other less delicately attuned minds? Cases have certainly been recorded of

such; might not the man before me be another?

A grim laugh from Major Faversham interrupted my train of thought.

"So you've been seeing ghosts, have you?" he was saying. "Well, I'm going to give them the job of reforming you."

"Reforming me, sor?" There was an uneasy look in Maloney's eyes as he repeated the words.

"Yes, I'm going to give you one last chance of keeping off the drink and becoming a decent soldier. But the next time you're 'on the peg' I'm going to take your case myself and sentence you to a night's solitary confinement — *in the Devil's Tower!*"

Maloney did not seem to comprehend. "Beggin' yer pardon, sor, but which one is that? There's so many different towers about the place that Oi mix up the names."

Unseen by the other man, Major Faversham turned to me and gave me a slow, expressive wink, which I assumed to mean that he had some deep-laid scheme in hand.

"It is the tower which stands at the northwestern angle of the outer walls," he explained in a solemn and impressive voice. "It contains the ancient torture-chamber. Within it, Guy Fawkes—to mention only one case—was racked, to make him confess who were his fellow conspirators in the Gunpowder Plot. It is the place that has more ghosts hanging around it than all the rest of the other dungeons put together—and that's where you're going to spend the night the next time you get drunk!"

Maloney was visibly impressed by the threat. To a disbeliever in ghosts the punishment might have appeared absurdly light, but for him it had real terror.

"Is that punishment in the King's rules and reg'lations, sor?" he asked in an unsteady voice.

In spite of his assumed gravity, I could see the corners of Faversham's mouth twitch.

"The War Office does not take cognizance of the unseen world," he replied, controlling his amusement. "Solitary confinement is quite in order, and I'll throw in the ghosts free gratis. So let's have no more trouble, Maloney. Have a glass or two and welcome, if you wish to, but don't mix up duty and drinking. If you do——"

"Yis, sor?"

"You're for a night alone with the ghosts of the Devil's Tower!"

DURING the days which followed this serio-comic interview I kept an anxious eye on the behavior of Private Maloney. In my mind I had but little faith that the major's threat of an enforced sojourn among disembodied spirits would outweigh the allurements of the spirits of a more potent and material nature, the effects of which had hitherto formed a lively accompaniment to such pay-nights as Maloney had been at liberty to indulge in them. But one Friday came and went without alcoholic celebrations; then another and another, until I began to think that the impossible had happened, and that he had been weaned from his besetting failing by a bogy which existed only in Major Faversham's fertile imagination. For at that time we had no reason to regard his statement that the Devil's Tower was haunted as otherwise than a somewhat grim jest.

This tower, which forms a defense of the outer walls, is commonly known as the "Devereux Tower," but that was not its original name. In an ancient survey of the fortress, taken in the reign of Henry VIII, it is called "Robyn the Devyll's

Tower," but in a later plan of 1597 it figures as the "Develin Tower." It is only when we come to 1601 after Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, had been confined there, that we find it referred to as the "Devereux Tower."

There can be not the slightest doubt that it is an extremely antique structure—some authorities assigning to it a date anterior to the square Norman keep known as the White Tower, and it retains for the most part its original character, having undergone little or no alteration. In form it approaches almost to a circle, and consists of two stories, with one apartment on each, ascended by a narrow winding staircase of stone. The basement floor, which is vaulted and groined, is about nineteen feet in diameter, and the walls are eleven feet thick.

Though undoubtedly used as a state prison from the earliest times, there was not the slightest evidence of it ever having contained the ancient torture-chamber—that part of the story had been an entirely gratuitous assumption on the major's part. But we were soon to receive tragic proof that his words, lightly uttered though they were, had come surprizingly near the truth.

"HALT! Who goes there?"

"Keys."

"Whose keys?"

"King George's keys."

"Advance, King George's keys, and all's well."

It was the ancient ceremony of "The King's Keys," that quaint, old-world ritual which for centuries has been repeated nightly at the main guard-house when the gates of the Tower are locked for the night.

On the particular occasion of which I write, however, there was a new and unrehearsed incident introduced. No sooner had the red-cloaked yeoman-porter commenced to close the massive gates than a wild and dishevelled figure appeared on the bridge that spans the moat. My heart sank as I recognized it. It was Private Maloney, hatless, coatless, and fighting drunk. Heaven knows by what miracle he had forced his way past the picket at the other end of the bridge, but his grazed knuckles and swollen lip showed that his passage had not been undisputed.

Half a dozen flying strides took him across the bridge; then, lowering his head, he charged the gate like a bull. The next few minutes were more like a night raid in the trenches than the peaceful ceremony of locking up the Tower. Taken by surprize, the venerable old gentleman with the keys performed a complicated evolution not to be found in the drill-book, which ended by his assuming the supine position on top of the equally venerable old gentleman who carried the lantern. The next instant a smashing left from Maloney had sent the sergeant of the guard down to keep them company.

But Maloney's triumph was short-lived. Recovering from their astonishment, the guard laid aside their rifles and closed round him, a pair of handcuffs clicked on his wrists, and he was helpless. But his spirit was far from subdued, even then.

"Take these bracelets off, ye dhirty blackguards, and Oi'll show ye——"

"Silence!" I roared in my best parade manner. "Are you mad?"

"Divil a bit of it—'tis only dhrunk Oi am, Captain darlint. Faith, and what 'ud Saint Pathrick's Day be widout a sup or two to remimber it by? Sure, for the honor of ould Oireland Oi had to——"

"Now then, what's all this row about?" said a voice out of the darkness. Major Faversham, attracted by the din, had come from his quarters to ascertain the reason of it.

There was no need for explanation, however. No sooner did his eyes rest on our prisoner than he had grasped the situation.

"So it's you again, eh? Well, I warned you what was going to happen the next time. You're going to have a night's lodging in the Devil's Tower—with the ghosts to keep you company."

An instantaneous change took place in the bearing of Private Maloney. The words seemed to sober him like a dash of ice-cold water. His truculent attitude dropped from him like a cloak, and in its place there came an emotion very much like fear.

"You're going to lock me up in that place ye spoke about—the Devil's Tower?" he said slowly.

"You've stated my intentions exactly."

"But—think, sor"—there was undisguised terror in the man's voice now—"the place is haunted!"

I stepped forward and called the guard to attention. Then I turned to Maloney.

"You knew perfectly well what you were up against if you got drunk again," I told him sternly, as I placed myself at the head of the little squad. "Sergeant, get the keys of the Devil's Tower. Guard . . . slope arms! By the right . . . quick march!"

Five minutes later the iron-studded door had clanged to, and Private Maloney was a prisoner in the Devil's Tower.

I MUST confess that my mind was not entirely at ease as I made my way to my quarters and turned in. Had Major Faversham been as clever as he had thought? Not that I thought for a moment that the old place was really haunted; it was rather its possible effect on the mind of the man who *did* think so that left me filled with vague misgivings.

I was still worrying over the problem when I fell asleep, and it was the first thing that leapt to my mind when, some two hours later, I was awakened by an urgent and insistent knocking. Leaping from my bed and snapping on the lights, I found it was the sergeant of the guard.

"What's the trouble, sergeant?"

"There's something queer going on in the Devil's Tower, sir—something I can't make head or tail of."

"The Devil's Tower?" I cried in amazement. "Why, that's where we put Private Maloney!"

"Yes, and it's from his cell that the noises are coming."

"What kind of noises?" I demanded, as I began to dress hurriedly.

"Talking in different voices, and sounds I can't put a name to. There seemed to be three people in there. Maybe more."

"Then why on earth didn't you open the door?"

"I tried to, sir—it was the first thing I did—but the key wouldn't fit."

"Nonsense!" I cried. "It opened easily enough when we put him in. You must have taken the wrong key."

The sergeant shook his head positively. "I tried every one on the bunch, sir."

Telling the sergeant to arouse Major Faversham and apprise him that something was amiss, I buckled my belt, slipped my revolver into its holster, and made my way along the path in the shadow of the battlements and a few minutes later stood before the door of Maloney's cell. I had the bunch of keys in my hand, but before attempting to use them I stood still and listened.

There was a confused low muttering coming from within. I bent my ear close to the nail-studded door.

"Lave me alone, will ye?"—it was obviously Maloney's voice—"For what d'ye want to kape botherin' me? Oi don't know what ye're talking about at all."

Then, to my surprize, there came another voice. It was clear and bell-like, as much removed from the Irishman's brogue as is possible to imagine.

"Tell me the names of thine associates in thine enterprise," it said. "It is useless to prevaricate—it will but make thy punishment more terrible. Confess everything, and His Majesty will show his clemency by having thee executed forthwith."

"Then ye can thank him from me for nothing!" returned Maloney emphatically.

"Thy treasonable speech showeth that thou art hardened in thy guilt," said the silvery voice. "Methinks there is naught to do but put thee to the torment. So Robin and his fellows must persuade thee with their arts. Ho, knaves! Seize him!"

I waited to hear no more. Quickly selecting the key, I thrust it into the lock. Strange!—the key was much too small. Withdrawing it, I examined it by the light of my electric torch. Surely it was the right key, for there was the name of the tower engraved on the haft. Could I be at the wrong door? Impossible—had I not heard Maloney speaking inside?

I was still trying to straighten out the chaos of my thoughts when hurried steps on the spiral stairs announced the arrival of Faversham and the sergeant. In a hurried whisper I explained what I had heard, and immediately afterward, as though to confirm my words, there came the sounds of a short, sharp struggle from within, followed by a prolonged creaking like that of an ill-greased cart-wheel.

"Thou seest, we do not jest," said the bell-like voice. "For the last time, who are thine accomplices?"

"Ye're crazy! How can Oi tell ye what Oi don't know meself?" demanded Maloney wrathfully.

"I fear me thou art obdurate. So . . ."

The voice ceased as though the speaker had made a gesture to some unseen person. At once the creaking was resumed, but this time it sounded as if the wheel were revolving more slowly.

I turned to look at Faversham, and I remember wondering if my own face was as deathly white as his.

"This is beyond me," he muttered. "There's something so cursedly strange about the business that——"

A terrible cry came from behind the locked door—a sobbing, gasping shriek such as is wrung by direct agony.

"He's being murdered in there!" shouted Faversham. "Break down the door!"

With one accord we threw ourselves against it, but the massive, iron-bound oak remained unmoved by our puny efforts. Desperately we panted and sweated, and all the while we could hear the devilish creaking from within, interspersed with faint groans and the sound of the ice-cold voice urging, "Confess—confess."

At last Faversham staggered back against the wall and thrust his fingers in his ears to keep out the sounds.

"I can stand it no longer!" he gasped. "Sergeant, go to the bomb-store and bring me a Mills number two. We must blow open the door."

THE sergeant saluted and clattered downstairs, returning in a few seconds with the bomb. Loosely tying the four corners of my handkerchief together, I placed the deadly, egg-shaped engine of destruction inside, and hung the knotted loop on the door-handle so that the bomb rested against the ponderous lock. With a warning to the others to take cover, I pulled out the safety-pin, allowing the lever to fly up, then ran for my life.

I had barely time to wedge myself behind a neighboring stone pillar before the fuse reached the ammonal. There came a flash of white fire, a sharp, ear-splitting detonation, a whirring and tink-

ling of flying fragments against the stone walls.

Coughing and choking with the acrid fumes of the explosion, I dashed through the splintered door and swept the beam of my torch round the apartment. Then I staggered and leant, sick and trembling, against the door-post, utterly unmanned by the horrible and unexpected sight which met my eyes.

Our unfortunate prisoner lay on the floor in a stiff and constrained attitude, his arms and legs stretched out rigidly to their fullest extent. His face was livid and wet with the sweat of mortal agony. His eyes were wide open and fixed with a stony stare straight in front of him. And although he had been untouched by the fragments of the bomb, he was quite dead.

For a few moments I stood swaying as I tried to realize the meaning of it all. Then, for the first time in my life, I suppose I must have fainted.

I HAVE not the slightest idea whether I walked back to my own quarters or was carried there. My first clear recollection is feeling the tang of raw spirits in my mouth, and seeing the face of our Medical Officer bending over me.

"Yes, the poor fellow was past all aid when I arrived," he said in answer to my first question. "And it wasn't the explosion that killed him, either. He just died of mortal terror."

I uttered some words—heaven knows what. Probably they were half-hysterical, for the M.O. again held the brandy to my lips.

"Sip this; then tell me everything that occurred."

I did so, hiding nothing. When I had finished there was a queer, brooding light in the doctor's eyes.

"So Major Faversham told the man that he was about to be confined in the old torture-chamber?"

I nodded, and after a long, thoughtful pause he went on:

"Auto-suggestion in a suitable subject is sometimes liable to go to incredible lengths. It is scarcely necessary for me to cite the well-attested phenomena which have resulted from time to time from prolonged mental stress; no doubt many of the miracles of the Middle Ages were due to this cause, possibly accentuated by religious ecstasy. But I have certainly never known any form of self-hypnotism capable of dislocating a man's arms and legs!"

"What?" I cried, aghast at this new horror.

"The dead man's limbs had been wrenched from their sockets, and violently, too. I suppose this could not have happened in the struggle when he was arrested?"

"Impossible! He was well enough when we left him."

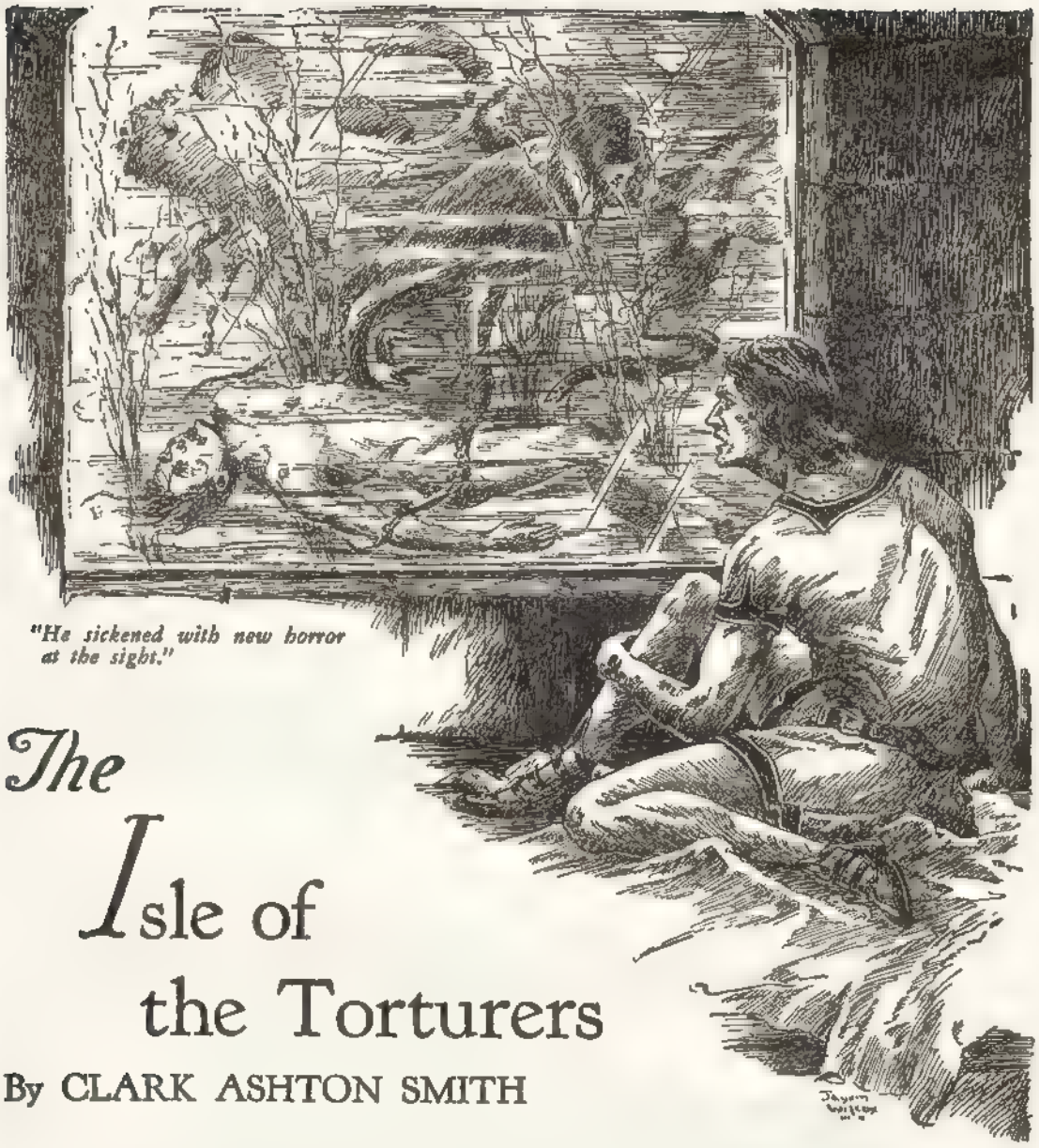
The M.O. pressed his lips together and a line of perplexity barred his forehead.

"Nor was that all," he said. "Around each wrist and ankle I found broad, red weals, such as might have been made by the ropes that used to stretch the victim on the rack——"

"The rack!" A dim light of understanding began to dawn on my mind. "The rack—in that old torture-chamber . . . I wonder . . ."

"So do I," said the doctor softly.

And we're wondering still.



"He sickened with new horror at the sight."

The Isle of the Torturers

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

A powerful story of terrific torments, and the strange, sudden onslaught of the Silver Death

BETWEEN the sun's departure and return, the Silver Death had fallen upon Yoros. Its advent, however, had been foretold in many prophecies, both immemorial and recent. Astrologers had said that this mysterious malady, heretofore unknown on earth, would descend from the great star, Achernar, which presided balefully over all the lands of the southern continent of Zothique; and having sealed the flesh of a myriad men with its bright, metallic pallor, the plague would still go on in time and space, borne by the dim currents of ether to other worlds.

Dire was the Silver Death; and none knew the secret of its contagion or the cure. Swift as the desert wind, it came into Yoros from the devastated realm of Tasuun, overtaking the very messengers

who ran by night to give warning of its nearness. Those who were smitten felt an icy, freezing cold, an instant rigor, as if the outermost gulf had breathed upon them. Their faces and bodies whitened strangely, gleaming with a wan luster, and became stiff as long-dead corpses, all in an interim of minutes.

In the streets of Silpon and Siloar, and in Faraad, the capital of Yoros, the plague passed like an eery, glittering light from countenance to countenance under the golden lamps; and the victims fell where they were stricken; and the deathly brightness remained upon them.

The loud, tumultuous public carnivals were stilled by its passing, and the merrymakers were frozen in frolic attitudes. In proud mansions, the wine-flushed revellers grew pale amid their garish feasts, and reclined in their opulent chairs, still holding the half-emptied cups with rigid fingers. Merchants lay in their counting-houses on the heaped coins they had begun to reckon; and thieves, entering later, were unable to depart with their booty. Diggers died in the half-completed graves they had dug for others; but no one came to dispute their possession.

There was no time to flee from the strange, inevitable scourge. Dreadfully and quickly, beneath the clear stars, it breathed upon Yoros; and few were they who awakened from slumber at dawn. Fulbra, the young king of Yoros, who had but newly succeeded to the throne, was virtually a ruler without a people.

FULBRA had spent the night of the plague's advent on a high tower of his palace above Faraad: an observatory tower, equipped with astronomical appliances. A great heaviness had lain on his heart, and his thoughts were dulled with an opiate despair; but sleep was remote from his eyelids. He knew the many predictions that foretold the Silver Death; and moreover he had read its imminent coming in the stars, with the aid of the old astrologer and sorcerer, Vemdeez. This latter knowledge he and Vemdeez had not cared to promulgate, knowing full well that the doom of Yoros was a thing decreed from all time by infinite destiny; and that no man could evade the doom, unless it were written that he should die in another way than this.

Now Vemdeez had cast the horoscope of Fulbra; and though he found therein certain ambiguities that his science could not resolve, it was nevertheless written plainly that the king would not die in Yoros. Where he would die, and in what manner, were alike doubtful. But Vemdeez, who had served Altath the father of Fulbra, and was no less devoted to the new ruler, had wrought by means of his magical art an enchanted ring that would protect Fulbra from the Silver Death in all times and places.

The ring was made of a strange red metal, darker than ruddy gold or copper, and was set with a black and oblong gem, not known to terrestrial lapidaries, that gave forth eternally a strong, aromatic perfume. The sorcerer told Fulbra never to remove the ring from the middle finger on which he wore it—not even in lands afar from Yoros and in days after the passing of the Silver Death: for if once the plague had breathed upon Fulbra, he would bear its subtle contagion always in his flesh; and the contagion would assume its wonted virulence with the ring's removal. But Vemdeez did not tell the origin of the red metal and the dark gem, nor the price at which the protective magic had been purchased.

With a sad heart, Fulbra had accepted the ring and had worn it; and so it was that the Silver Death blew over him in the night and harmed him not. But wait-

ing anxiously on the high tower, and watching the golden lights of Faraad rather than the white, implacable stars, he felt a light, passing chillness that belonged not to the summer air. And even as it passed the gay noises of the city ceased; and the moaning lutes faltered strangely and expired. A stillness crept on the carnival; and some of the lamps went out and were not re-lit. In the palace beneath him there was also silence; and he heard no more the laughter of his courtiers and chamberlains. And Vemdeez came not, as was his custom, to join Fulbra on the tower at midnight. So Fulbra knew himself for a realmless king; and the grief that he still felt for the noble Altath was swollen by a great sorrow for his perished people.

Hour by hour he sat motionless, too sorrowful for tears. The stars changed above him; and Achernar glared down perpetually like the bright, cruel eye of a mocking demon; and the heavy balsam of the black-jewelled ring arose to his nostrils and seemed to stifle him. And once the thought occurred to Fulbra, to cast the ring away and die as his people had died. But his despair was too heavy upon him even for this; and so, at length, the dawn came slowly in heavens pale as the Silver Death, and found him still on the tower.

IN THE dawn, King Fulbra rose and descended the coiled stairs of porphyry into his palace. And midway on the stairs he saw the fallen corpse of the old sorcerer Vemdeez, who had died even as he climbed to join his master. The wrinkled face of Vemdeez was like polished metal, and was whiter than his beard and hair; and his open eyes, which had been dark as sapphires, were frosted with the plague. Then, grieving greatly for the death of Vemdeez, whom he had loved as a foster-father, the king went slowly on. And in the suites and halls below, he found the bodies of his courtiers and servants and guardsmen. And none remained alive, excepting three slaves who warded the green, brazen portals of the lower vaults, far beneath the palace.

Now Fulbra bethought him of the counsel of Vemdeez, who had urged him to flee from Yoros and to seek shelter in the southern isle of Cyntrom, which paid tribute to the kings of Yoros. And though he had no heart for this, nor for any course of action, Fulbra bade the three remaining slaves to gather food and such other supplies as were necessary for a voyage of some length, and to carry them aboard a royal barge of ebony that was moored at the palace porticoes on the river Voum.

Then, embarking with the slaves, he took the helm of the barge, and directed the slaves to unfurl the broad amber sail. And past the stately city of Faraad, whose streets were thronged with the silvery dead, they sailed on the widening jasper estuary of the Voum, and into the amaranth-colored gulf of the Indaskian Sea.

A favorable wind was behind them, blowing from the north over desolate Tasuun and Yoros, even as the Silver Death had blown in the night. And idly beside them, on the Voum, there floated seaward many vessels whose crews and captains had all died of the plague. And Faraad was still as a necropolis of old time; and nothing stirred on the estuary shores, excepting the plumy, fan-shapen palms that swayed southward in the freshening wind. And soon the green strand of Yoros receded, gathering to itself the blueness and the dreams of distance.

Creaming with a winy foam, full of strange murmurous voices and vague tales of exotic things, the halcyon sea was about the voyagers now beneath the high-

lifting summer sun. But the sea's enchanted voices and its long, languorous, immeasurable cradling could not soothe the sorrow of Fulbra; and in his heart a despair abided, black as the gem that was set in the red ring of Vemdeez.

Howbeit, he held the great helm of the ebon barge, and steered as straightly as he could by the sun toward Cyntrom. The amber sail was taut with the favoring wind; and the barge sped onward all that day, cleaving the amaranth waters with its dark prow that reared in the carven form of an ebony goddess. And when the night came with familiar austral stars, Fulbra was able to correct such errors as he had made in reckoning the course.

For many days they flew southward; and the sun lowered a little in its circling behind them; and new stars climbed and clustered at evening about the black goddess of the prow. And Fulbra, who had once sailed to the isle of Cyntrom in boyhood days with his father Altath, thought to see ere long the lifting of its shores of camphor and sandalwood from the winy deep. But in his heart there was no gladness; and often now he was blinded by wild tears, remembering that other voyage with Altath.

Then, suddenly and at high noon, there fell an airless calm, and the waters became as purple glass about the barge. The sky changed to a dome of beaten copper, arching close and low; and as if by some evil wizardry, the dome darkened with untimely night, and a tempest rose like the gathered breath of mighty devils and shaped the sea into vast ridges and abysmal valleys. The mast of ebony snapped like a reed in the wind, and the sail was torn asunder, and the helpless vessel pitched headlong in the dark troughs and was hurled upward through veils of blinding foam to the giddy summits of the billows.

Fulbra clung to the useless helm, and the slaves, at his command, took shelter in the forward cabin. For countless hours they were borne onward at the will of the mad hurricane; and Fulbra could see naught in the lowering gloom, except the pale crests of the beetling waves; and he could tell no longer the direction of their course.

Then, in that lurid dusk, he beheld at intervals another vessel that rode the storm-driven sea, not far from the barge. He thought that the vessel was a galley such as might be used by merchants that voyaged among the southern isles, trading for incense and plumes and vermilion; but its oars were mostly broken, and the toppled mast and sail hung forward on the prow.

For a time the ships drove on together; till Fulbra saw, in a rifting of the gloom, the sharp and somber crags of an unknown shore, with sharper towers that lifted palely above them. He could not turn the helm; and the barge and its companion vessel were carried toward the looming rocks, till Fulbra thought that they would crash thereon. But, as if by some enchantment, even as it had risen, the sea fell abruptly in a windless calm; and quiet sunlight poured from a clearing sky; and the barge was left on a broad crescent of ocher-yellow sand between the crags and the lulling waters, with the galley beside it.

Dazed and marvelling, Fulbra leaped on the helm, while his slaves crept timidly forth from the cabin, and men began to appear on the decks of the galley. And the king was about to hail these men, some of whom were dressed as humble sailors and others in the fashion of rich merchants. But he heard a laughter of strange voices, high and shrill and somehow evil,

that seemed to fall from above; and looking up he saw that many people were descending a sort of stairway in the cliffs that enclosed the beach.

The people drew near, thronging about the barge and the galley. They wore fantastic turbans of blood-red, and were clad in closely fitting robes of vulturine black. Their faces and hands were yellow as saffron; their small and slaty eyes were set obliquely beneath lashless lids; and their thin lips, which smiled eternally, were crooked as the blades of simitars.

They bore sinister and wicked-looking weapons, in the form of saw-toothed swords and double-headed spears. Some of them bowed low before Fulbra and addressed him obsequiously, staring upon him all the while with an unblinking gaze that he could not fathom. Their speech was no less alien than their aspect; it was full of sharp and hissing sounds; and neither the king nor his slaves could comprehend it. But Fulbra bespoke the people courteously, in the mild and mellow-flowing tongue of Yoros, and inquired the name of this land whereon the barge had been cast by the tempest.

Certain of the people seemed to understand him, for a light came in their slaty eyes at his question; and one of them answered brokenly in the language of Yoros, saying that the land was the Isle of Uccastrog. Then, with something of covert evil in his smile, this person added that all shipwrecked mariners and seafarers would receive a goodly welcome from Ildrac, the king of the Isle.

At this, the heart of Fulbra sank within him; for he had heard numerous tales of Uccastrog in bygone years; and the tales were not such as would reassure a stranded traveler. Uccastrog, which lay far to the east of Cyntrom, was commonly known as the Isle of the Torturers; and men said that all who landed upon it unaware, or were cast thither by the seas, were imprisoned by the inhabitants and were subjected later to unending curious tortures whose infliction formed the chief delight of these cruel beings. No man, it was rumored, had ever escaped from Uccastrog; but many had lingered for years in its dungeons and hellish torture-chambers, kept alive for the pleasure of King Ildrac and his followers. Also, it was believed that the Torturers were great magicians who could raise mighty storms with their enchantments, and could cause vessels to be carried far from the maritime routes, and then fling them ashore upon Uccastrog.

Seeing that the yellow people were all about the barge, and that no escape was possible, Fulbra asked them to take him at once before King Ildrac. To Ildrac he would announce his name and royal rank; and it seemed to him, in his simplicity, that one king, even though cruel-hearted, would scarcely torture another or keep him captive. Also, it might be that the inhabitants of Uccastrog had been somewhat maligned by the tales of travelers.

So Fulbra and his slaves were surrounded by certain of the throng and were led toward the palace of Ildrac, whose high, sharp towers crowned the crags beyond the beach, rising above those clustered abodes in which the island people dwelt. And while they were climbing the hewn steps in the cliff, Fulbra heard a loud outcry below and a clashing as of steel against steel; and looking back, he saw that the crew of the stranded galley had drawn their swords and were fighting the islanders. But being outnumbered greatly, their resistance was borne down by the swarming Torturers; and most of them were taken alive. And Fulbra's heart misgave him sorely at this sight;

and more and more did he mistrust the yellow people.

Soon he came into the presence of Ildrac, who sat on a lofty brazen chair in a vast hall of the palace. Ildrac was taller by half a head than any of his followers; and his features were like a mask of evil wrought from some pale, gilded metal; and he was clad in vestments of a strange hue, like sea-purple brightened with fresh-flowing blood. About him were many guardsmen, armed with terrible scythe-like weapons; and the sullen, slant-eyed girls of the palace, in skirts of vermilion and breast-cups of lazuli, went to and fro among huge basaltic columns. About the hall stood numerous engineries of wood and stone and metal such as Fulbra had never beheld, and having a formidable aspect with their heavy chains, their beds of iron teeth and their cords and pulleys of fish-skin.

THE young king of Yoros went forward with a royal and fearless bearing, and addressed Ildrac, who sat motionless and eyed him with a level, unwinking gaze. And Fulbra told Ildrac his name and station, and the calamity that had caused him to flee from Yoros; and he mentioned also his urgent desire to reach the Isle of Cyntrom.

"It is a long voyage to Cyntrom," said Ildrac, with a subtle smile. "Also, it is not our custom to permit guests to depart without having fully tasted the hospitality of the Isle of Uccastrog. Therefore, King Fulbra, I must beg you to curb your impatience. We have much to show you here, and many diversions to offer. My chamberlains will now conduct you to a room befitting your royal rank. But first I must ask you to leave with me the sword that you carry at your side; for swords are often sharp—and I do not wish my guests to suffer injury by their own hands."

So Fulbra's sword was taken from him by one of the palace guardsmen; and a small ruby-hilted dagger that he carried was also removed. Then several of the guards, hemming him in with their scythed weapons, led him from the hall and by many corridors and downward flights of stairs into the solid rock beneath the palace. And he knew not whither his three slaves were taken, or what disposition was made of the captured crew of the galley. And soon he passed from the daylight into cavernous halls illumed by sulfur-colored flames in copper cressets; and all around him, in hidden chambers, he heard the sound of dismal moans and loud, maniacal howlings that seemed to beat and die upon adamantine doors.

In one of these halls, Fulbra and his guardsmen met a young girl, fairer and less sullen of aspect than the others; and Fulbra thought that the girl smiled upon him compassionately as he went by; and it seemed that she murmured faintly in the language of Yoros: "Take heart, King Fulbra, for there is one who would help you." And her words, apparently, were not heeded or understood by the guards, who knew only the harsh and hissing tongue of Uccastrog.

After descending many stairs, they came to a ponderous door of bronze; and the door was unlocked by one of the guards, and Fulbra was compelled to enter; and the door clanged dolorously behind him.

The chamber into which he had been thrust was walled on three sides with the dark stone of the island, and was walled on the fourth with heavy, unbreakable glass. Beyond the glass he saw the blue-green, glimmering waters of the undersea, lit by the hanging cressets of the chamber; and in the waters were great devil-fish whose tentacles writhed along the wall; and huge pythonomorphs with fabulous golden coils receding in the

gloom; and the floating corpses of men that stared in upon him with eyeballs from which the lids had been excised.

There was a couch in one corner of the dungeon, close to the wall of glass; and food and drink had been supplied for Fulbra in vessels of wood. The king laid himself down, weary and hopeless, without tasting the food. Then, lying with close-shut eyes while the dead men and the sea-monsters peered in upon him by the glare of the cressets, he strove to forget his griefs and the dolorous doom that impended. And through his clouding terror and sorrow, he seemed to see the comely face of the girl who had smiled upon him compassionately, and who, alone of all that he had met in Uccastrog, had spoken to him with words of kindness. The face returned ever and anon, with a soft haunting, a gentle sorcery; and Fulbra felt, for the first time in many suns, the dim stirring of his buried youth and the vague, obscure desire of life. So, after a while, he slept; and the face of the girl came still before him in his dreams.

The cressets burned above him with undiminished flames when he awakened; and the sea beyond the wall of glass was thronged with the same monsters as before, or with others of like kind. But amid the floating corpses he now beheld the flayed bodies of his own slaves, who, after being tortured by the island people, had been cast forth into the submarine cavern that adjoined his dungeon, so that he might see them on awakening.

He sickened with new horror at the sight; but even as he stared at the dead faces, the door of bronze swung open with a sullen grinding, and his guards entered. Seeing that he had not consumed the food and water provided for him, they forced him to eat and drink a little, menacing him with their broad, crooked blades till he complied. And then they led him from the dungeon and took him before King Ildrac, in the great hall of tortures.

Fulbra saw, by the level golden light through the palace windows and the long shadows of the columns and machines of torment, that the time was early dawn. The hall was crowded with the Torturers and their women; and many seemed to look on while others, of both sexes, busied themselves with ominous preparations. And Fulbra saw that a tall brazen statue, with cruel and demonian visage, like some implacable god of the underworld, was now standing at the right hand of Ildrac where he sat aloft on his brazen chair.

FULBRA was thrust forward by his guards, and Ildrac greeted him briefly, with a wily smile that preceded the words and lingered after them. And when Ildrac had spoken, the brazen image also began to speak, addressing Fulbra in the language of Yoros, with strident and metallic tones, and telling him with full and minute circumstance the various infernal tortures to which he was to be subjected on that day.

When the statue had done speaking, Fulbra heard a soft whisper in his ear, and saw beside him the fair girl whom he had previously met in the nether corridors. And the girl, seemingly unheeded by the Torturers, said to him: "Be courageous, and endure bravely all that is inflicted; for I shall effect your release before another day, if this be possible."

Fulbra was cheered by the girl's assurance; and it seemed to him that she was fairer to look upon than before; and he thought that her eyes regarded him tenderly; and the twin desires of love and life were strangely resurrected in his heart, to fortify him against the tortures of Ildrac.

Of that which was done to Fulbra for the wicked pleasure of King Ildrac and his people, it were not well to speak fully. For the islanders of Uccastrog had designed innumerable torments, curious and subtle, wherewith to harry and excruciate the five senses; and they could harry the brain itself, driving it to extremes more terrible than madness; and could take away the dearest treasures of memory and leave unutterable foulness in their place.

On that day, however, they did not torture Fulbra to the uttermost. But they racked his ears with cacophonous sounds; with evil flutes that chilled the blood and curdled it upon his heart; with deep drums that seemed to ache in all his tissues; and thin tabors that wrenched his very bones. Then they compelled him to breathe the mounting fumes of braziers wherein the dried gall of dragons and the adipocere of dead cannibals were burned together with a fetid wood. Then, when the fire had died down, they freshened it with the oil of vampire-bats; and Fulbra swooned, unable to bear the fetor any longer.

Later, they stripped away his kingly vestments and fastened about his body a silken girdle that had been freshly dipt in an acid corrosive only to human flesh; and the acid ate slowly, fretting his skin with infinite fiery pangs.

Then, after removing the girdle lest it slay him, the Torturers brought in certain creatures that had the shape of ell-long serpents, but were covered from head to tail with sable hairs like those of a caterpillar. And these creatures twined themselves tightly about the arms and legs of Fulbra; and though he fought wildly in his revulsion, he could not loosen them with his hands; and the hairs that covered their constringent coils began to pierce his limbs like a million tiny needles, till he screamed with the agony. And when his breath failed him and he could scream no longer, the hairy serpents were induced to relinquish their hold by a languorous piping of which the islanders knew the secret. They dropped away and left him; but the mark of their coils was imprinted redly about his limbs; and around his body there burned the raw branding of the girdle.

King Ildrac and his people looked on with a dreadful gloating; for in such things they took their joy, and strove to pacify an implacable obscure desire. But seeing now that Fulbra could endure no more, and wishing to wreak their will upon him for many future days, they took him back to his dungeon.

LYING sick with remembered horror, feverish with pain, he longed not for the clemency of death, but hoped for the coming of the girl to release him as she had promised. The long hours passed with a half-delirious tedium; and the cressets, whose flames had been changed to crimson, appeared to fill his eyes with flowing blood; and the dead man and the sea-monsters swam as if in blood beyond the wall of glass. And the girl came not; and Fulbra had begun to despair. Then, at last, he heard the door open gently and not with the harsh clangor that had proclaimed the entrance of his guards.

Turning, he saw the girl, who stole swiftly to his couch with a lifted finger-tip, enjoining silence. She told him with soft whispers that her plan had failed; but surely on the following night she would be able to drug the guards and obtain the keys of the outer gates; and Fulbra could escape from the palace to a hidden cove in which a boat with water and provisions lay ready for his use. She prayed him to endure for another day the

torments of Ildrac; and to this, perforce, he consented. And he thought that the girl loved him; for tenderly she caressed his feverous brow, and rubbed his torture-burning limbs with a soothing ointment. He deemed that her eyes were soft with a compassion that was more than pity. So Fulbra believed the girl and trusted her, and took heart against the horror of the coming day. Her name, it seemed, was Ilvaa; and her mother was a woman of Yoros who had married one of the evil islanders, choosing this repugnant union as an alternative to the flaying-knives of Ildrac.

Too soon the girl went away, pleading the great danger of discovery, and closed the door softly upon Fulbra. And after a while the king slept; and Ilvaa returned to him amid the delirious abominations of his dreams, and sustained him against the terror of strange hells.

At dawn the guards came with their hooked weapons, and led him again before Ildrac. And again the brazen, demoniac statue, in a strident voice, announced the fearful ordeals that he was to undergo. And this time he saw that other captives, including the crew and merchants of the galley, were also awaiting the malefic ministrations of the Torturers in the vast hall.

Once more in the throng of watchers the girl Ilvaa pressed close to him, unreprimanded by his guards, and murmured words of comfort; so that Fulbra was enheartened against the enormities foretold by the brazen oracular image. And indeed a bold and hopeful heart was required to endure the ordeals of that day. . . .

Among other things less goodly to be mentioned, the Torturers held before Fulbra a mirror of strange wizardry, wherein his own face was reflected as if seen after death. The rigid features, as he gazed upon them, became marked with the green and bluish marbling of corruption; and the withering flesh fell in on the sharp bones, and displayed the visible fretting of the worm. Hearing meanwhile the dolorous groans and agonizing cries of his fellow-captives all about the hall, he beheld other faces, dead, swollen, lidless and flayed, that seemed to approach from behind and to throng about his own face in the mirror. Their looks were dank and dripping, like the hair of corpses recovered from the sea; and sea-weed was mingled with the locks. Then, turning at a cold and clammy touch, he found that these faces were no illusion but the actual reflection of cadavers from the under-sea by a malign sorcery, that had entered the hall of Ildrac like living men and were peering over his shoulder.

His own slaves, with flesh that the sea-things had gnawed even to the bone, were among them. And the slaves came toward him with glaring eyes that saw only the voidness of death. And beneath the sorcerous control of Ildrac, their evilly animated corpses began to assail Fulbra, clawing at his face and raiment with half-eaten fingers. And Fulbra, faint with loathing, struggled against his dead slaves, who knew not the voice of their master and were deaf as the wheels and racks of torment used by Ildrac. . . .

ANON the drowned and dripping corpses went away; and Fulbra was stripped by the Torturers and was laid supine on the palace floor, with iron rings that bound him closely to the flags at knee and wrist, at elbow and ankle. Then they brought in the disinterred body of a woman, nearly eaten, in which a myriad maggots swarmed on the uncovered bones and tatters of dark corruption; and this body they placed on the right hand of Fulbra. And also they fetched the car-

rion of a black goat that was newly touched with beginning decay; and they laid it down beside him on the left hand. Then, across Fulbra, from right to left, the hungry maggots crawled in a long and undulant wave. . . .

After the consummation of this torture, there came many others that were equally ingenious and atrocious, and were well designed for the delectation of King Ildrac and his people. And Fulbra endured the tortures valiantly, upheld by the thought of Ilvaa.

Vainly, however, on the night that followed this day, he waited in his dungeon for the girl. The cressets burned with a bloodier crimson; and new corpses were among the flayed and floating dead in the sea-cavern; and strange double-bodied serpents of the nether deep arose with an endless squirming; and their horned heads appeared to bloat immeasurably against the crystal wall. Yet the girl Ilvaa came not to free him as she had promised; and the night passed. But though despair resumed its old dominion in the heart of Fulbra, and terror came with talons steeped in fresh venom, he refused to doubt Ilvaa, telling himself that she had been delayed or prevented by some unforeseen mishap.

At dawn of the third day, he was again taken before Ildrac. The brazen image, announcing the ordeals of the day, told him that he was to be bound on a wheel of adamant; and, lying on the wheel, was to drink a drugged wine that would steal away his royal memories for ever, and would conduct his naked soul on a long pilgrimage through monstrous and infamous hells before bringing it back to the hall of Ildrac and the broken body on the wheel.

Then certain women of the Torturers, laughing obscenely, came forward and bound King Fulbra to the adamantine wheel with thongs of dragon-gut. And after they had done this, the girl Ilvaa, smiling with the shameless exultation of open cruelty, appeared before Fulbra and stood close beside him, holding a golden cup that contained the drugged wine. She mocked him for his folly and credulity in trusting her promises; and the other women and the male Torturers, even to Ildrac on his brazen seat, laughed loudly and evilly at Fulbra, and praised Ilvaa for the perfidy she had practised upon him.

So Fulbra's heart grew sick with a darker despair than any he had yet known. The brief, piteous love that had been born amid sorrow and agony perished within him, leaving but ashes steeped in gall. Yet, gazing at Ilvaa with sad eyes, he uttered no word of reproach. He wished to live no longer; and yearning for swift death, he bethought him of the wizard ring of Vemdeez and of that which Vemdeez had said would follow its removal from his finger. He still wore the ring, which the Torturers had deemed a bauble of small value. But his hands were bound tightly to the wheel, and he could not remove it. So, with a bitter cunning, knowing full well that the islanders would not take away the ring if he should offer it to them, he feigned a sudden madness and cried wildly:

"Steal my memories, if ye will, with your accursed wine—and send me through a thousand hells and bring me back again to Uccastrog: but take not the ring that I wear on my middle finger; for it is more precious to me than many kingdoms or the pale breasts of love."

HEARING this, King Ildrac rose from his brazen seat; and bidding Ilvaa to delay the administration of the wine, he came forward and inspected curiously

the ring of Vemdeez, which gleamed darkly, set with its rayless gem, on Fulbra's finger. And all the while, Fulbra cried out against him in a frenzy, as if fearing that he would take the ring.

So Ildrac, deeming that he could plague the prisoner thereby and could heighten his suffering a little, did the very thing for which Fulbra had planned. And the ring came easily from the shrunken finger; and Ildrac, wishing to mock the royal captive, placed it on his own middle digit.

Then, while Ildrac regarded the captive with a more deeply graven smile of evil on the pale, gilded mask of his face, there came to King Fulbra of Yoros the dreadful and longed-for thing. The Silver Death, that had slept so long in his body beneath the magical abeyance of the ring of Vemdeez, was made manifest even as he hung on the adamantine wheel. His limbs stiffened with another rigor than that of agony; and his face shone brightly with the coming of the Death; and so he died.

Then, to Ilvaa and to many of the Torturers who stood wondering about the wheel, the chill and instant contagion of the Silver Death was communicated. They fell even where they had stood; and the pestilence remained like a glittering light on the faces and hands of the men and shone forth from the nude bodies of the women. And the plague passed along the immense hall; and the other captives of King Ildrac were released thereby from their various torments; and the Torturers found surcease from the dire longing that they could assuage only through the pain of their fellow-men. And through all the palace, and throughout the Isle of Uccastrog, the Death flew swiftly, visible in those upon whom it had breathed, but otherwise unseen and impalpable.

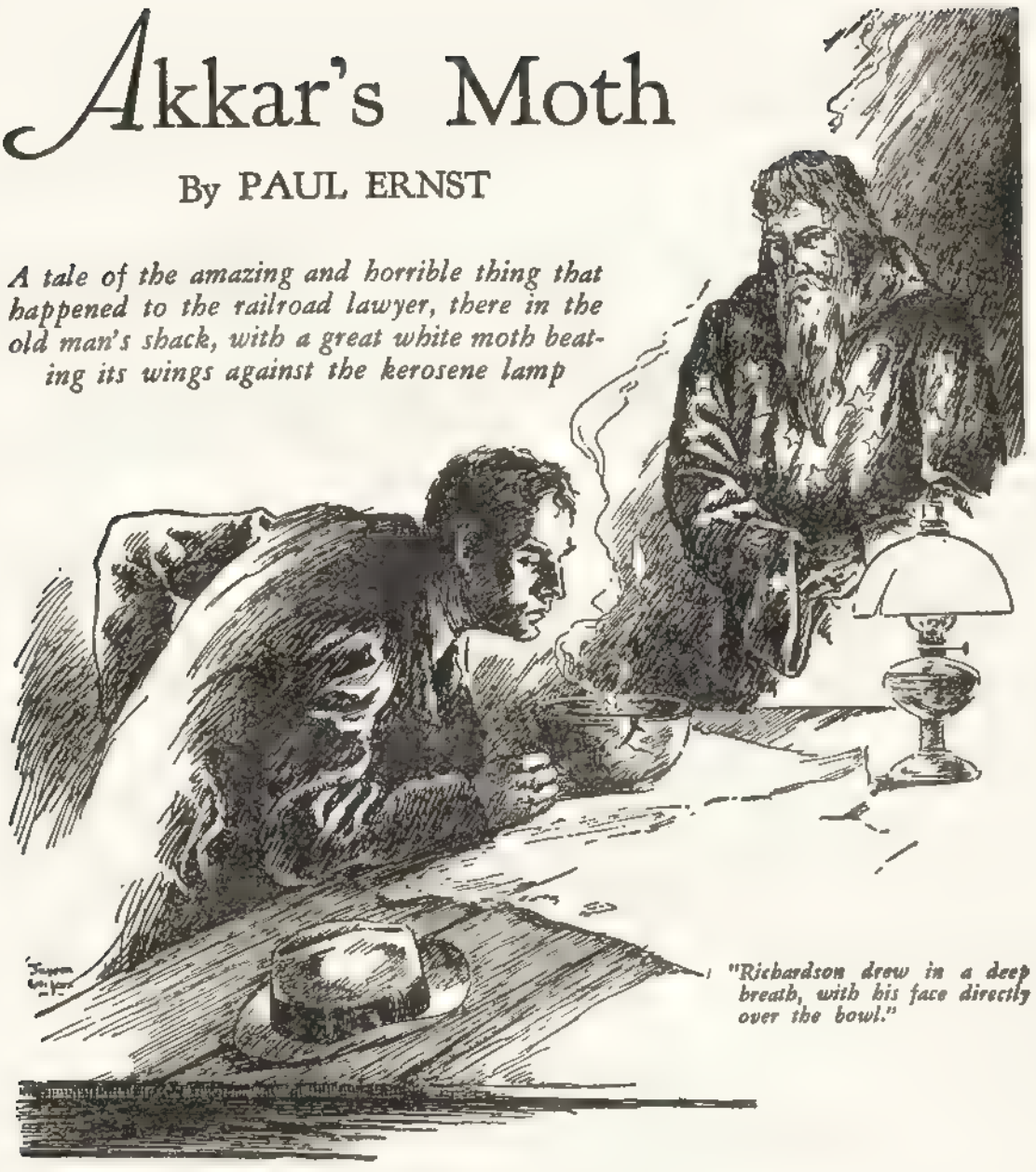
But Ildrac, wearing the ring of Vemdeez, was immune. And guessing not the reason of his immunity, he beheld with consternation the doom that had overtaken his followers, and watched in stupefaction the freezing of his victims. Then, fearful of some inimic sorcery, he rushed from the hall; and standing in the early sun on a palace-terrace above the sea, he tore the ring of Vemdeez from his finger and hurled it to the foamy billows far below, deeming in his terror that the ring was perhaps the source or agent of the unknown hostile magic.

So Ildrac, in his turn, when all the others had fallen, was smitten by the Silver Death; and its peace descended upon him where he lay in his robes of blood-brightened purple, with features shining palely to the unclouded sun. And oblivion claimed the Isle of Uccastrog; and the Torturers were one with the tortured.

Akkar's Moth

By PAUL ERNST

A tale of the amazing and horrible thing that happened to the railroad lawyer, there in the old man's shack, with a great white moth beating its wings against the kerosene lamp



"Richardson drew in a deep breath, with his face directly over the bowl."

"IT WAS a horrible thing," said Malcolm in a low tone. "And the fact that I know so little of what really happened makes it seem all the more horrible."

We were speaking of the fate of Richardson, a man who had been to school with us. Several years had passed since I'd seen Malcolm; several years since I'd left my home town. Now that I'd returned for a visit, I wanted to get caught up on all the local happenings.

Particularly I wanted to find out what had happened to Richardson. I'd saved him till the last, however; with half my interest centering on what Malcolm was saying about other old schoolmates, and the other half absorbed by the haunting tale told by the newspaper clipping that was even at that moment in my pocket.

Now I had asked directly concerning him. And Malcolm—had answered!

"A horrible thing," he repeated. His face twitched with a minor nervous disorder—something new for him; he'd never owned to a nerve in the years I knew him before. "Simply unbelievable. And yet, I'm afraid I believe it. I've never told any one about it. I'll tell you, though. Perhaps you'll laugh. . . ."

But at no time during his low-toned conversation that evening did I have the slightest desire to laugh—unless it were hysterically. When I had heard him to the end I felt I should never laugh again. At anything!

As YOU and I have often agreed [said Malcolm], Blaine Richardson could have gone to the city and made a brilliant career in law. He was born with a legal mind, I think, and no man had better schooling and training.

But, as you know, he decided to stay here in this little town of ours. Wasting his talents, most folks said. But he liked it here and turned down offers from the city.

Of course, a mind like his set down in this small place was bound to shine high in a hurry. Shortly after you left here he was retained by the Darlington Railroad to handle all their law cases in this part of the country. Other important people turned their business over to him. In about a year and a half, so fast did he grow, he found himself one of the big men of our town.

But it was his work for the Darlington Railroad, in an indirect sort of way, that finished him.

You remember old Akkar, who used to live down by the swamp alongside the Darlington spur? Some said he was Armenian, and some insisted he was Persian. But no one knew anything about him save that they were morally sure he'd come here from somewhere in the Orient.

Well, old Akkar, long white beard and shabby white hair and all, tangled with the Darlington Railroad. You wouldn't think one old man, poor as dirt and supposedly half-witted, could interfere much in the workings of a big railroad corporation, would you? But Akkar did!

You remember his reputation. He was said to have the Evil Eye, all that sort of rot. Folks from the back country used to cross themselves when they passed him. The kids were all afraid of him, though they jeered him behind his back. We used to laugh at the ignorance of those who feared him. But there were a lot of them who did; and over them old Akkar seemed to have an evil sort of power.

The start of the whole business was a silly little thing. The Darlington used to let gondolas of coal lie over on the siding next Akkar's shack by the swamp; and Akkar used to keep his rusty old stove in fuel from those cars. Then one day the division superintendent decided there was no reason why Akkar should help himself to several tons of company coal every year. He made a formal complaint and a deputy was sent to Akkar's place.

The deputy never would say much about what had happened when he went into Akkar's shack on his errand. Apparently the old hermit had managed to throw an awful scare into him. However, Akkar stopped taking coal and it was thought the little affair was over. But it wasn't over. And what had started as a small affair, instigated by a peevish division superintendent, became a terribly big affair.

As you'll remember, the Darlington was building a small railroad yard here at that time. They had perhaps a hundred men, mainly Mexicans and cheap labor from the hills, working on the tracks.

Suddenly, a short time after the coal business, they began to have trouble with these laborers. There was no open strike, but things went badly. Little things. It seemed that nothing could be done right the first time. Everything had to be done over—and sometimes over again. In no time they found themselves 'way behind their schedule.

The Darlington people set their detective on the affair. The detective trailed one of the men, a big hillman, to Akkar's hut one night, and there he heard Akkar give him orders to set fire to a carload of ties. He was to soak them with gasoline which Akkar would supply.

This was penitentiary stuff. But the Darlington didn't want to put an old and apparently feeble man behind bars.

The milk of human kindness isn't often found in big corporations. It seems ironical that in this, one of the few cases on record, it could have been so misplaced. Pity for Akkar! That white-bearded, rheumy-eyed old fiend!

The division superintendent took the affair up with Richardson. Would he please see Akkar, unofficially, and warn him to stop stirring up trouble among the men?

Richardson would. At the first opportunity.

I'LL never forget the night he whistled to me from the sidewalk—I was sitting on the porch here after dinner—and asked me if I wanted to go wizard-hunting.

"Wizard-hunting?" I repeated.

"Yes. Old Akkar's supposed to be a first-class magician, isn't he? And I'm on my way to his shack to pull his claws. Want to come along?"

There he stood, on the sidewalk by the gate, six feet or more tall, with his deep-set, rather cold gray eyes and his heavy, black hair—he was bareheaded as usual. Only twenty-eight, but a powerful and commanding figure. It seemed a little ridiculous that such a man should be set on a frail, aged hermit.

I guess it seemed that way to Richardson himself, for he said, as I joined him:

"I'm going easy on the old fellow. We don't want to make trouble for him, only he's got to stop making trouble among the Darlington laborers."

"How are you going to handle him?" I asked.

We started down the street, toward the outskirts of town. It was a nice night, and the distance to the hut was only half a mile or so. No use driving.

"Threaten him with a ninety-day sentence in the workhouse if he doesn't quit scaring the men into doing his dirty work for him," Richardson replied. "That ought to put him in his place."

We walked along, in the comfortable silence possible between old friends. We got to the end of the street, down by the sawmill, and strode out on the gravel back-road that leads down to the swamp and the spur track where Akkar had built his patchy shack.

Over the horizon swung a yellow moon, big as a pumpkin. Trees and bushes lined the road now, and the wind sifted through them with a sighing sound.

"Just the night for bats and lost souls to go moaning about, eh?" Richardson laughed.

I looked at the moon, and I listened to the rattling tree-leaves. And you know, just the faintest chill feeling touched my spine. I think I laughed louder than I need have as I answered:

"Better not speak too jokingly of lost souls, old man. 'There are more things in heaven and on earth——' "

"Pshaw!" said Richardson lightly.

But you know how he was. Not a nerve in his body. Cold and clear of thought and intellect.

Some crazy impulse led me to go on with it.

"Akkar has the reputation of being very learned in the Black Arts. Ask any of the old women living around here. He might send you up in a puff of vapor if you come meddling with his affairs."

"You don't say," Richardson yawned.

"Remember the time he got annoyed at Hutch, the dairy man, and made all his cream sour three nights running?"

Richardson grinned.

"And remember the time he cast his evil eye on that cow of Macey's—and the cow had a two-headed calf?"

Richardson's grin broadened.

"And look at what happened to Mrs. Jensen's baby. She irritated old Akkar and he made it dumb for three months!"

We both burst out laughing. Laughing! It was like two lunatics laughing as they stood on the edge of a bottomless abyss with one more step to take them over and down into black depths. But we laughed—and went on.

IT WAS quite dark when we got to Akkar's shack. We stood a moment, eyeing it from the road.

The old man wasn't much of a carpenter. You wondered, as you looked at this hovel of his that was made from tags of lumber from the sawmill and sheets of rusted galvanized iron discarded by the Darlington supplies department, how on earth it managed to stand up.

"Now there," said Richardson jokingly, "is real proof that the old man is a wizard of the first order. If he weren't, his confounded shack would blow over in a summer zephyr."

We started across the rubbish-littered yard toward the "door" of the place, which was nothing but another rusted sheet of iron which Akkar propped against the entrance when he wanted to close it.

"He's home, all right," muttered Richardson, pointing.

I saw it too. A light, shining mistily behind the burlap that hung down as a curtain over the shack's one window.

We walked to the door, stumbling over tin cans and refuse. Richardson knocked on the rusted iron sheet.

"Who knocks?"

A thin and quavering voice, almost as high as a woman's. We heard movement behind the iron door; shaky footsteps.

"Who knocks?"

Richardson grimaced. It was distasteful, this whole affair—threatening a senile old man who was alone in the world and had nothing but this shack to shelter him. But the business had to be done.

"It's Blaine Richardson, Akkar. I'd like to speak to you a moment."

"Ah! Richardson!"

Was it my imagination that a touch of ferocity lay in the high, cracking voice—that the *s* in the name was drawn out in a sibilant, exultant way?

The iron sheet was painfully tugged aside. In the doorway, framed by yellow light from an old kerosene lamp, stood Akkar.

You remember how Akkar looked, of course, from seeing him on the street. But he was different tonight, visited in his own home!

His bent, gnarled body was covered by a black robe of some cheap stuff. On it he had crudely sewed stars and crescent moons of equally cheap tinsel. I've no doubt that in daylight the costume would have brought a smile; but in that feeble yellow light it looked rather impressive, with his scant white hair seeming almost like a blasphemous halo, and his white beard cascading half-way to his waist.

"There are two of you," said Akkar, almost with accusation. "Is it that you were afraid to see me alone, Mr. Richardson?"

"Hardly," said Richardson with a tolerant smile. "But you wouldn't blame me at that, if I thought I needed some protection, would you? After all, your reputation. . . ."

Akkar bowed, as though the compliment had been sincere instead of rooted in jest.

"You might well need protection, Mr. Richardson—you who come to fight with me."

"How do you know I come to fight? I'm quite sure we've never met or spoken. And I'm quite sure the Darlington people didn't send you an advance notice of my visit."

I was surprized at the question. Surely no imagination was needed to tell Akkar that a fight was coming. Everybody knew Richardson's connection with the railroad. But then I understood. Richardson, for his own amusement probably, was giving the old man a chance to show off his alleged mystical powers. And Akkar took the chance. Cleverly!

"I know all things," he said. "My moths tell me."

With that, he stepped aside, both as an invitation for us to enter and to let us see what he was talking about.

MY EYES went first to that which always attracts the gaze in darkness —the light. And I saw something fluttering about the mantle of the kerosene lamp. A moth. A pure white moth, gigantic in size, probably four inches in wing-spread.

Richardson chuckled as we stepped into the room.

"A variation on the bat idea," he said in an undertone. "Moths instead. Good. Though bats would look more gruesome. . . ."

Low as the words were, Akkar's old ears caught them.

"I can see, Mr. Richardson, that you and your friend are not to be taken in by my poor display," he said. "But sit down, pray."

I rather marveled at his command of English, he who had so obviously hailed from some far corner of the Orient. It was a little stiff, but it was excellent nevertheless. The man had a mind, it seemed.

The interior of the shack was as poorly furnished as you might have imagined it to be. There was an old pine table in the center, on which was the lamp. There was a broken-backed kitchen chair near it; and farther off, in the shadows, was a discarded easy-chair with the stuffing coming out in half a dozen places.

Richardson sat on the kitchen chair. Somewhat gingerly, I started to sit in the easy-chair. . . .

There was a wailing shriek. I started, and jumped up. But it was only a cat, which had been curled in the seat of the chair and hidden from me by the shadow of the arm.

"A black cat, by George!" exclaimed Richardson. "This is perfect."

My gaze went up from the big black cat, which stood beside Akkar and spat at us while with glaring yellow eyes it watched us, to the white moth that fluttered about the lamp, and then to the rather tawdry, star-spangled black robe Akkar had on.

It was too perfect, I thought. Cheap and theatrical. But even as I thought it, Akkar spoke.

"I use these things in my business, gentlemen," he said, humbly, as though to admit at once that he knew *we* would not be moved by the stage props. "As you may know, I sometimes tell a fortune. It helps me live."

Was the man a mind-reader? I decided not. He had simply caught the question in our eyes. But he was smart, all right; much smarter than one would

have thought just from seeing him go mumbling around the streets.

I could see now why he would have so much power over the ignorant Darlington track laborers. I guess Richardson saw it, too, for he abruptly got down to business.

"Akkar, I've come to tell you that you must stop making trouble with the railroad construction men. Yes, *must*. If you don't, you'll find yourself in serious trouble."

Akkar looked at that moment like a wily, white-bearded fox.

"How is it thought that I make trouble?" he evaded.

"It isn't thought," responded Richardson tartly. "It is known." He smiled coldly. "Your telltale moths don't seem to be always on the job, Akkar. For instance, the other night they didn't tell you that a company detective was hiding out beyond your window, and that he heard you order a laborer to set fire to some ties."

Akkar only shrugged.

"Sometimes I am careless, Mr. Richardson," was all he said.

"You've been too careless, for too long," said Richardson. "In your talk, I mean. I repeat, you must stop making trouble."

"If I don't?"

The old body seemed to swell with hidden strength. The old eyes—have I said that, though they looked black usually, they seemed to flash at times with a greenish fire?—glowed with defiance.

"If I don't, Mr. Richardson?"

"If you don't, we'll have to send you to jail. And we can do it, with the testimony of the detective."

"You couldn't—if the man died of some strange disease."

The old man's voice was calm and low. But for the second time that night I felt a chill creep along my spine.

It was oppressively hot in the shack. The heat, I thought, had made me a little dizzy. Anyway, the black cat, as I glanced at it, seemed to grow enormously. And the white moth, banging with faint thuds against the glass mantle of the lamp, seemed to turn and stare at me with beady black eyes.

"Save that talk for somebody else," said Richardson, in his cold, emotionless voice. "The detective will live to testify, all right, and you'll be put behind bars."

"But think how it would look," Akkar said, oilily spreading his palms. Was he pleading, as he seemed to be—or was there mockery in his voice? "A great railroad—persecuting an old and lonely man. It might be made into a very scandalous affair, Mr. Richardson."

And this was the man most folks in our town thought was half-witted!

It was a good, keen thrust. But Richardson sat unmoved. As a clever lawyer, he would of course try to go around the obstacle of threatened adverse public opinion. But I knew—and Akkar must have known, too—that if the provocation were big enough, public opinion could go to the devil!

"The railroad would not have to appear in the case, in any event," said Richardson. And a new note in his voice told me that he had re-measured this opponent, found him worthy of serious attention, and was moving accordingly. "I could have you run out of town for pretending to be what you're not."

"And that is?" murmured Akkar, his white eyebrows lifting.

"A wizard! A magician! Faugh! Think of such faking going on in the Twentieth Century!"

"Faking?" said Akkar. "Well, perhaps it is."

More and more I was distrusting the humility in that old voice. Akkar did not feel humble. I could sense that. Some-

how, power seemed to fill that bent old frame, and every moment I was wishing more heartily that we were away from there. Not for anything on earth would I have admitted it—then—but I was beginning to feel that we were in some sort of danger. Frightful danger!

"But, Mr. Richardson," said Akkar with a thin smile, "the public always likes to be fooled. I doubt if you could run me out of town because I pretend to supernatural powers."

"I think I could. But we'll let that pass, too, and go on to still a third count against you. That is—fortune-telling. There's a law against that, in this state, in case you don't know it."

Akkar sighed.

"Perhaps you could win on that point," he admitted.

I SAT up straighter. Even Richardson started a little. It was too easy. As I say, power fairly radiated from the man as you sat longer and longer in his presence. Power, and a certain impression of ominous intelligence. And now he was giving in without further struggle.

"Then you will stop interfering with the Darlington Railroad construction work?"

"Yes," said Akkar.

"And you will quit troubling the men by calling them here and playing on their superstitions with your silly magician's tricks?"

"Yes."

"I have that as a promise, then, with my friend Malcolm Davis as witness?"

"You have," said Akkar.

"Good." Richardson started briskly to rise. But the old man held out his hand.

"On one condition, Mr. Richardson!"

Richardson sank back onto the chair. "So there's a catch in it, Akkar? Well, what is it?"

Akkar's bent shoulders seemed to straighten. The hawk nose above the white beard compressed at the nostrils. Did I see raw hate flaming from his greenish eyes? I thought I did!

"Your company has persecuted me, an old man, Mr. Richardson. Because of a few lumps of coal——"

"Three or four tons in the course of a winter, Akkar," Richardson cut in. But the old man ignored him.

"——because of a few lumps of coal, you have persecuted me. And it is not safe for any group of men—or any man they may employ, such as yourself—to persecute Akkar!"

The man straightened yet more, and twenty years seemed to drop from his aged shoulders. As though in tune with his thoughts, his monstrous black cat spat at us again. It was very eery.

"Yet will I do as you wish," Akkar went on, "if in return you will do something for me."

"About the coal?" Richardson guessed. "Oh, all right. I'll keep you in coal out of my own pocket, simply to avoid a fuss."

"I am not speaking of the coal, Mr. Richardson. It is in regard to a smaller matter. A trifling matter."

Silence, while we waited for him to go on. He seemed to loom over us. The black of his robe, as I stared at it, appeared to take on bottomless depths, as though suddenly I were staring not at fabric but into the black sky itself, studded with stars and crescent moons.

Silence, while a faint, agitated squeaking came from the white moth at the lamp. The thing left the light and darted toward the window. And now a curious thing happened.

A single syllable cracked from Akkar's lips. A word in some language I'd never heard before.

The white moth stopped its dash toward the window, and headed back for the lamp. Submissively? In active obedience to the flashing look in Akkar's eyes and the single syllable? God knows; I don't. But the moth did act as though possessed.

Richardson glanced at me, and smiled. "Always the showman," that look said to me. But I did not smile back.

"The favor you wanted?" Richardson reminded Akkar.

The old man's piercing eyes left the white moth. He nodded.

"Ah, yes. The favor. It is simply this. You have made several accusations tonight concerning my powers. I am no magician, you say. I am a cheat, fooling ignorant people only. Now I do not say, in so many words, that you are wrong. But I do desire permission to show you a few of my tricks——"

"To prove that you are a wizard?" snorted Richardson, interrupting bluntly. "Save your time, my friend."

"It is a little thing to ask." The humility in Akkar's tone! The submissiveness! But—what a look in his eyes!

"Sorry, I haven't time," said Richardson curtly. Again he started to rise. But again Akkar held up his hand.

"You will grant me the favor, Mr. Richardson, or the trouble among your men will continue—and you can take such legal steps against me as you please!"

Richardson frowned.

"This seems to be a moment when surrender is in order," he said lightly. "All right, Akkar. Set about your work. Give me a lesson in Black Magic."

Now something happened that left me ashamed for quite awhile. I couldn't help it, though. To save my life I could not have repressed the move; it sprang from some deep-rooted instinct that knew far more than my brain did.

"No!" I cried, springing to my feet. "No, Richardson! Don't let him——"

Then I realized what I was saying, and how I was acting. I sat down, with a sheepish smile on my lips. But I was trembling a little. I don't mind admitting that—now.

"Are you crazy, Malcolm?" said Richardson, staring. "Of course I'll let him do what he pleases. Why not?"

Well, I didn't know why not. All I knew was that, in spite of all reason and logic, I felt suddenly sick to the soul. And when the white moth, abruptly leaving the lamp and flying almost into my eyes, as though the thing hated me, bumped into my cheek, it was all I could do to choke down a scream.

"Are you going to tell my fortune, Akkar?" Richardson asked. "Or are you going to make an orange tree sprout up out of the floor?"

Akkar smiled. And the light in his eyes seemed to match in feline hatred the light in the golden eyes of the cat.

"Those are little things, Mr. Richardson. I shall do a greater. But your friend, he seems nervous. Would he perhaps care to step outside for a few minutes?"

Akkar gazed squarely at me, and the impact of his gaze came with a physical shock. Until this moment he had concentrated all his attention on Richardson. Now I got the full force of his personality for an instant, and I was shaken.

There was a definite command in the green-glinting dark eyes of Akkar. He was ordering—*willing*—me to leave the shack. At least, so I thought; and later the thought was confirmed. I could see how Akkar would have been very glad if I had gone away from that place for awhile. The fact that, in a few moments, he went right ahead with his devil's work in spite of my presence as a material wit-

ness, only shows how sure he was that my testimony later could do him no harm. And events proved him right. . . .

Richardson laughed. "Want to step outside and sniff the clean evening breeze?" he said to me.

I did want to. Whether my intuitions are more sensitive than his were, or whether his will was firmer than mine, I don't know. But I do know that he was far less perturbed than I was. With all my heart I wanted to get out of that place. I am rather proud of myself that I did not.

"I'll stick around," I said, as calmly as I could. But Akkar's thin lips writhed as he turned from me. He knew the panic in my heart, all right!

"What particular demonstration of the Black Arts are you going to stage for me?" persisted Richardson.

"That of second sight," said Akkar. He said it quickly, glibly. The words came too easily, I thought vaguely, to be words of truth. "I shall show you things few men have seen, and when I am finished you can think of my powers what you please."

"Second sight it is," said Richardson gayly. "I am in your hands, Akkar."

AT THESE words, as though at a signal, the big white moth left the lamplight again. It darted to Akkar, circled once around his head, then sped on silent wings to Richardson and repeated the performance.

"Ay, my little white beauty," Akkar purred. "It would make friends with you, Mr. Richardson."

His senile, cracked laugh rang out in the room. I bit my lip at the sound of it. Richardson frowned.

"Get on with it, please, Akkar."

"Very well," the old man said. "I will. The second sight, servant of people who have persecuted me, is about to be yours."

He started moving about his place, then; and my eyes followed apprehensively his every move. Later I could reconstruct the scene detail by detail. And a lot of good it did!

He got a dirty piece of wrapping-paper from a cupboard and spread it over the bare table. On this he set a cracked earthenware bowl. Then he began collecting withered, evil-looking herbs from various corners of the room. Some were familiar to me, some were not. All came, I think, from the swamp across the road from his hut.

He crushed the dry and brittle herbs to fragments, while Richardson and I watched him intently. He put the resulting debris into the earthenware bowl, and added a colorless fluid from a tin can.

"Just a minute," snapped Richardson. "The dried weeds are harmless enough, I guess, but what is that other stuff?"

"It is but water, Mr. Richardson," murmured Akkar. "Will you taste it?"

He offered the can to me. I shrank away, instinctively.

"It is safe enough to taste," said Akkar, smiling his oily smile. "Would I dare let harm come to you in my own home?"

At that, I tasted; and found it was indeed plain water. At least, if any foreign ingredients were in it, the amount was too small for my tongue to detect.

Richardson tasted too. "All right," he said bruskly. "I simply wanted to make sure. . . . I know you don't exactly love me, Akkar!"

"I do not, Mr. Richardson," mumbled Akkar, his eyes flashing again. "But as I have said, I would not dare attempt bodily violence in my own home."

And still we stayed! It seems incredible now, after hearing from his own lips what

his feeling for us was. But we were so sure of ourselves, simply because we were two able-bodied young men pitted against a feeble old man. No wonder those of the Orient think us children in wisdom!

"You will not be asked to drink this potion, anyway," said Akkar. "Only to inhale its fumes."

Richardson nodded in a bored way. And Akkar began to stir the mess in the earthenware bowl. As he stirred, I saw his lips move as though with words. But no sound came from them, and I don't know to this day whether he was repeating actual syllables for some sinister reason of his own, or whether his lips, slack with age, were simply moving uncertainly with the movements of his old arm as he stirred.

I left the easy-chair, now, and came to stand by the table so I could see more closely what was being done. I saw that the water and herbs in the bowl had united to form a thin paste, like green soup.

"That is all, gentlemen," said Akkar. "It is not a very elaborate preparation for so great a boon as second sight, is it?"

His eyes were glittering feverishly. His nostrils were white with some inner excitement. The way he stared at Richardson was enough in itself—or should have been—to send us on the run from that den of the abnormal and supernatural.

"One last thing remains to be done," mumbled Akkar. "One little thing. . . ."

He straightened up from the bowl. He stood tall and commanding above it. Old? His years must have been close to ninety, but in that instant he was fired with youth. Black youth, unwholesome and unnatural.

A sharp sentence sounded from his lips, a string of guttural words that seemed to be part of no known language. At the same time he passed his hand over the bowl, thumb raised and palm flat.

Instantly the contents of the bowl sent up a thin, greenish vapor. The mess was stone-cold, so it could not have been the fumes of heat. I had watched him intently enough to know that nothing had dropped from his hand, in the nature of a chemical reagent, when he passed it across the bowl. Yet the greenish vapor coiled up from the devil's brew for several minutes.

"And now, Mr. Richardson," purred Akkar, his tongue flickering over his lips to moisten them, "if you and your friend will but breathe deeply of the fumes—you will be very greatly surprized at what may occur."

Well, Akkar himself had called the turn a few minutes before. A man can't harm two guests—known to be under his roof—and hope to get away with it. Akkar was too clever to do anything so crude as try to poison us. Certainly it would be all right to breathe the fumes.

"I'll try a whiff first," said Richardson lightly. "You watch and see what happens."

"We'll both try it," I said promptly, crushing down the inner voices that were whispering things to me.

"No, no!" said Richardson quickly. "If we both did," he explained, "we'd both see the same hallucinations. If only one of us indulges, the other can check up on the 'magic' results."

"But it seems your friend wishes to join you," muttered Akkar, bending his piercing gaze on me again.

Once more I trembled in the hypnotic force of the old man's glare. I think my hand went up as if to brush away an invisible chain that seemed to bind me to him. The Evil Eye! I used to laugh at the childish phrase. . . .

But, summoning all my remaining will-

power, I managed to resist his glared command. Thank God, thank God. . . .

"I'll be the spectator, I think," I said to Akkar. "Perhaps it *would* be better if one of us remained clear-headed—to see what happens to the other."

"Very well," said Akkar. "But you gentlemen seem to me to be making a very significant thing out of what was proposed as a humble trick of magic—faked, of course!"

"All set, Malcolm?" Richardson asked. "I'm going to try a sniff of this second sight, simply as the price of peace with Akkar; and then we'll go home."

He was still sitting on the broken chair beside the table. Now he bent over the still fuming brew in the bowl. . . .

No, no, no, no, no! those inner voices shrieked silently to me in a sort of desperate chant. Don't let him! Don't let him! Don't let him!

But I said nothing—as any other man of our set would have said nothing. After all, didn't we learn at college that there are no such things as supernatural phenomena?

However, my fingers ached, they were clenching themselves so rigidly; and my breathing hurt my chest as I watched.

RICHARDSON calmly drew in a deep breath, with his face directly over the bowl. Nothing seemed to happen to him. Another deep inhalation. Still he appeared perfectly normal and all right.

And then—then—I began to feel dizzy. I don't know why that was. I can't imagine what Akkar did to make my senses reel as they were reeling at that moment. Richardson was the one who was breathing in the fumes, and apparently without effect—but *I* got dizzy and faint.

Things in the room began to swim around before my eyes. I saw the big black cat, lashing its swollen tail, seeming to be now in one place and now in another. Then sight seemed to fade altogether.

One last thing I saw—that damned white moth flying around and around Richardson's head—was it fancy that my friend's face seemed green and sick-looking?—and then I must have lost consciousness.

A sensation of cold on my forehead and wrists brought me around again. How many minutes later? I don't know. I looked up to find old Akkar leaning over me with a wet cloth.

"Richardson!" I shouted, springing to my feet and pushing Akkar aside. I stared frenziedly around. "Richardson!"

Then I saw him, slumped in the easy-chair, half hidden by the shadows. I jumped to his side.

"Are you all right? Tell me—you're all right?"

"Not a hair of his head has been harmed," I heard Akkar say. And then he laughed. God, how he laughed! High and shrill and cracked his laughter rang out, tearing at my nerves like a jagged knife-blade. "Not a hair of his head has been harmed."

Richardson, meanwhile, said no word. He simply sat, slumped back in the chair, staring up at me with eyes that neither saw me nor would have known me had they seen.

"Richardson," I whispered, "don't look at me like that! Say something. . . . "

I whirled toward Akkar.

"What have you done to him? Answer me! I'll kill you if you don't bring my friend back to normal instantly!"

"Normal?" His eery laugh sounded out again. "Have I not said I wouldn't harm a hair of his——"

With that I jumped for him, blindly,

hands spread to take that scrawny old throat between them. But before I got within six feet of him, I was stopped. By what? I don't know. But he might have surrounded himself with invisible steel rods for all the progress I could make toward him.

So we stood for a moment, Akkar's gaze mocking me. I could hear Richardson panting heavily in the chair. Then something white fluttered before my eyes. The moth.

I lashed out at it, distractedly. It escaped my hand, fluttered back out of reach, but continued to wheel and turn before my face on a level with my eyes, as though trying to distract my attention from Akkar.

And then a horrible, squeaking cry sounded out behind me. I half turned. Out of the corners of my eyes I saw Richardson get up from the easy-chair. The cry sounded again—*and it came from his lips!*

Stunned, I stood there, watching. And as I stood, too dazed to think, Richardson sprang for the window. A third time the high, squeaking cry came from his bloodless lips. Then he dashed the burlap curtain aside and leaped out into the night.

I could move, then—when it was too late. I ran to the window. . . .

"Richardson!" I shouted after him. But already he was across the road, and plunging into the swamp.

I started to jump out and follow him.

"Wait!" said Akkar.

I snarled at him. "Go to hell!"

"Wait, I say!"

Again that hypnotic power of his bit at my will. I halted a little longer at the window.

"But Richardson!" The words were wrung from me. "There are parts of that swamp that are bottomless. He'll die out there!"

"Your friend will not die." Weariness sounded in old Akkar's voice, now. Utter fatigue. As if he had been under an immense strain for a long time. But in spite of the fatigue, there was fiendish triumph—and boundless power—in his high, thin voice. "Your friend will not die. I do not wish him to die. That would be too easy. Come, now, and I will tell you where you may find him. If you do not listen, you never will see him again."

IN SPITE of myself, I left the window, my gaze still searching, over my shoulder, the black line of the swamp. I came back to the table, where Akkar had sunk wearily into the broken chair.

"You will find your friend under—*or perhaps in*—the branches of the great sycamore that spreads its boughs a half-mile to the north and west of this house. You understand?"

The words only vaguely reached me. My eyes were on the white moth.

An odd thing had happened to it. In some way, it had fallen into the bowl of greenish paste on the table. Now it was struggling laboriously to climb up the slippery, sloping sides to freedom again.

Back it slipped, to climb up again, and yet again, till the rim was reached at last.

Two powerful, vital impulses tore at me. One was to try again to reach Akkar and stamp his life out. The other was to run into the swamp and rescue Richardson.

Neither was quite strong enough to rouse me from the odd daze in which I watched that white moth. I stared at it with all my eyes, Akkar forgotten, everything forgotten.

It had reached the rim at last, as I said. It hung there for an instant, then fell to the wrapping-paper on which the bowl was set.

It wasn't white now. It was green, a feebly moving thing with wings mired together and green slime trailing after it as it toiled across the paper.

But how erratically it was moving on that paper! Up and down—here and there—with no seeming direction. . . .

Why, it was——

"Ay!" Akkar screamed suddenly. His withered hand shot out to smash the moth.

But my hand was quicker. I caught his wrist, and I think I broke his arm when I twisted it. I hope so.

Then I snatched up the wrapping-paper, dying moth and all, and ran from that place as though all the fiends—instead of but one of them—were after me.

* * * * * * *

I STIRRED uneasily in the silence that followed Malcolm's words. It was warm and pleasant on the porch, where we were sitting. But in spite of that I felt cold.

"You found Richardson?" I said at last.

"Yes, I found him." Malcolm's tone was so low I barely caught it. "He was squatting in the lower branches of the sycamore Akkar directed me to. He leaped down as I came near, and kept darting at the flashlight I carried, all the time uttering those terrible moth-like cries. . . ." He sighed deeply. "You read the rest in the papers?"

I nodded, feeling the clipping in my pocket.

"His case is considered utterly hopeless," said Malcolm. "Not a trace of that fine intelligence of his is left. He—he has to be kept in a straitjacket. Otherwise he would try to jump out the window and fly. Toward the street lights. Always toward the light."

"But, good Lord, Malcolm!" I exclaimed. "This Akkar—what did you do to him?"

"Nothing. . . . Oh, I tried, all right. I *couldn't* testify to the entire, terrible truth. But I did press a charge of poisoning against him, said the fumes of the brew he mixed up had stolen Richardson's reason. But Akkar let chemists analyze it, and they found nothing harmful in it. The case was finally dropped, and Akkar left town shortly afterward."

I stared over the porch rail into a velvet darkness which an instant ago had seemed pleasant and which now seemed awful.

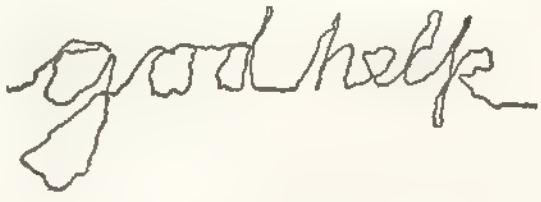
"The wrapping-paper, and the white moth," I said. "Have you still got them?"

"The moth got away while I was floundering through the swamp after Richardson. Or should I say, after Richardson's body? I could only hold the fragile thing loosely for fear of crushing it. I never saw it again. . . . I suppose it died, with its secret, in a few hours. I have the wrapping-paper, though; anyway, I have the part which is significant. I'll show you."

He got up and went into the house, returning with a torn fragment of brown paper. He held it up to the window behind us, through which came the light of a floor-lamp.

I gazed intently at it, and saw meandering tracks of fading, sticky green stuff. And then I sat down abruptly, feeling that my knees could no longer be trusted not to give under me.

For the tracks on the paper—the green trail of the moth—were:



The Letter

By S. GORDON GURWIT

A strange story of weird surgery—of the head that talked—and the eery death of an experimenter in forbidden fields of science

IT WAS during my term as district attorney that I received the letter. And it has haunted me ever since. Of course, during my occupation of the office, many letters came, oddities of confessions, threats, warnings, appeals; but I soon forgot them. However, the letter I received from Philip Krueger seared itself into my subconscious mind as relentlessly as aqua-fortis bites into metal.

If I am to make any sort of a coherent tale out of this, it would, perhaps, be best to give you the facts at once.

Believing him guilty, I had prosecuted and convicted Philip Krueger on a charge of murder. He was a young medical student, apparently of more than ordinary ability, who had killed another student named Lucien Alverez—his roommate.

These two young men lived together in an unsavory rooming-house on the lower east side—to be near the university clinic; and one night, Krueger had hit Alverez a fearful blow on the head with a chair, killing him instantly.

Another roomer had testified that he had been awakened by an unusual commotion, the frenzied cries of both men—as if engaged in mortal combat—and had arrived upon the scene to find the upper part of the house burning fiercely.

It was contended that Krueger set fire to the house to conceal his crime, but Krueger denied this wildly. In fact, his entire demeanor during the trial was unusual. He sat, for the most part, in a deep, voiceless apathy, seemingly unconscious of what went on around him. Occasionally he looked up, blinked, and was apparently surprized by his surroundings.

When the one witness was being questioned, Krueger seemed to awaken as if from a drugged sleep and listened intently. Noticing this, I stressed my next question:

"Would you mind, Mr. Dean," I said, to the witness, "telling the court just what you heard and saw that night? Tell it in your own way."

"Well, sir—it's just what I said before. I heard 'em shouting—the furniture breaking, and Krueger, he yelled, 'Alverez, you devil—I'll smash it'——"

"Object!" snapped the attorney for the defense. "The witness is using his imagination and presuming to look through the floor! How could he *know* it was the defendant talking? I move that reply be stricken from the records!"

"I recognized his voice," responded the witness, dryly, before the judge could sustain or overrule the objection.

I cautioned the witness and asked him to continue, the attorney for the defense asking an exception.

"Well," continued the witness, maliciously, "I recognized the voice of Alverez yelling, 'Stop! For God's sake, don't!' And then there were sounds as if some one was smashin' things with a baseball bat."

"Yes, go on. Then what happened?"

"Well, I ran upstairs and the place was ablaze. Looked like gasoline had been

spilled all over and half the room was burning fiercely——"

The prisoner jumped to his feet suddenly. "It was that damned liquid!" he cried, wildly. "Alverez made it—and it spilled! I wasn't near him—I was trying to crush and smash the head——" He stopped abruptly. His eyes glazed with some unspeakable horror and he threw up his hands as if to ward off some fearsome specter, and collapsed.

There was a recess after this. Although the evidence was purely circumstantial, it was overwhelming. True, no one had actually seen the crime committed, but I got a conviction. Not the maximum penalty. The jury gave him life imprisonment.

Then, on a technicality, his attorney appealed for a new trial, promising new evidenced by putting his client on the witness chair—something that Krueger had refused to do before. It was during this period—while Krueger was in jail—that he must have written the letter.

I could not verify all of his statements because the upper part of the house where the two students had lived was utterly destroyed by the fire; but I did find enough charred bones to make the explanation in his letter possible, but, then, there were so many pieces, scorched and burned, deformed by the fierce blast of the chemical blaze, as to make certainty impossible. As the matter stands now, I don't know if Krueger was guilty—or mad. I know little of the things he wrote me about. I place the case before you, without comment, for judgment.

HERE is Krueger's letter:

Even though you—as district attorney—have convicted me of a crime I know nothing about, I feel that you acted in all honesty—that you are an upright, honest man, a servant of the State sworn to do your duty.

But there are many things connected with this case that I could not tell in a courtroom. Not in the white light of day, although I intend to take the witness chair at the next trial—if I get one. And I don't always remember just what happened that night. Sometimes I fear that I am losing my mind when I do recall the vivid horror of that night.

Let me tell you the whole story as it actually happened, and let me say here that everything I write in this letter is true—so help me God!

As you know, Alverez and I had been living together for a year. We were the best of friends, and we had much in common, both being interested in revolutionizing the pharmaceutical world. Alverez, I confess, was far my superior in every branch of science, knowledge and imagination. He was a genius—nothing less—but a genius with a satanic tendency, a morbid, devilish humor. His idea of something funny was to put a smoldering pipe into the grinning jaws of a human skull we had in the room, cock a cap jauntily over one vacant eyesocket and grin at the grotesque combination.

"There you are!" he would observe. "Old man death on a holiday! Looks like a smoke makes him grin harder, doesn't it? Wonder what he would say if there was still a brain in that cranium?"

Then he would turn to his enormous, heterogeneous collection of bottles and jars and begin his never-ending experiments in flesh culture.

Ever since the remarkable researches and revolutionary discoveries of Doctor Von Geyso had been made public, Alverez had undertaken a similar effort with astonishing results. He concocted a formula wherein the growth of living cells had become a fact.

Naturally, this uncanny achievement filled both our minds with dreams; but Alverez stopped short of nothing—even the rebuilding of life itself began to seem a certainty to him. In all this I acted purely as an intelligent assistant.

He had jars of strange, saline liquids in which he kept chicken hearts beating for months. He had a culture of paste that smelled to the high heavens, where he tried to create an original life cell—like the ancestral ameba in the primeval morass.

"Life," he would say to me, his thin, eager face glowing, "is eternal. The living cell goes on. The natural law of the conservation of matter is greater than the thing we know as death. Look at that chicken heart! The chicken is gone—but the heart beats on!"

He thrilled me as his voice, eager, intense, rose, but I was always uneasy. It was soon after this that he concocted the terrible liquid that he called "flame."

"There!" he shouted to me. "There! It's sunlight and earth and the crucible for gestation——"

"Oh, nonsense! What's the formula?"

"Formula? Wait till we try it—then I'll tell you. Phil, I think I've got it this time! If I only had a subject worthy!" His feverish eyes swept the room. "I'll save it until we can get a good subject."

In truth, the liquid was extraordinary. It never stood still for a moment. It writhed and swirled and bubbled with an endless energy, constantly changing color—from blue to orchid, to red, to flame, then to venomous greens; and constantly it contorted and twisted uneasily.

Alverez had it in a huge glass bowl—we had emptied our aquarium of germinating specimens to accommodate it—and it fascinated me.

"By no means touch it!" he cautioned.

"Why not?"

"Just so. It would prove disastrous."

"What are you going to do with it?"

"Experiment, of course! As soon as we can get the proper specimen——"

"As, for instance?"

His eyes glowed darkly. "A human heart—from our dissecting-room!"

"And then?"

"I want to make it beat again! I'll keep it living for years! Or a human brain—perhaps I can make it function——"

"You're crazy!" I charged.

"Am I?" he countered, mysteriously. "Just wait and see!"

Some few days later, he obtained the objects for his experiment, and I watched, fascinated, as he went about his work; but it was a failure. His subjects were reduced to a pulp. He muttered excitedly over the bowl, his lanky figure stooped, looking for all the world like some gaunt, ancient alchemist, concocting a magical philtre and venturing into the realms of the forbidden. There was something eery about his muttering, his attitude, his pointed face and flashing eyes.

"Not quite right," he said to me later. "I've got to change the formula a bit, but I'm convinced that I'm on the right track."

IT WAS several evenings later that he came in late at night, with a large bundle under his arm, his brilliant eyes flaming.

"I've got it!" he cried to me, throwing the bundle on the table. "I've got it, Phil!"

"What?" It was after one and I wanted to go to bed. "What now?"

"Professor Kinkaid's expedition got back today from the Philippines and the South Seas. They've brought back a lot of interesting things—that's one of 'em—a head!"

"A—*what?*"

"A head! They were in the Moro

head-hunting country and they brought back some of the heads the Moros keep for ornaments. This one used to belong to a white man. They had a bunch of them, so the professor let me take this one for my experiment. It's a beauty!"

I shuddered and edged away from the bundle. "You're off your mind!" I charged. "What do you want with that thing? Why bring it here, where we have to live? Gosh! The place is like a morgue now!"

He hardly heard me. He was slipping off his coat, the light of the eager fanatic glowing in his face.

"Tonight we'll know!" he whispered tensely, unwrapping the package with trembling fingers.

Hardened as I am to human suffering, I could not help exclaiming over the terrible expression that death had etched upon that long-dead face. The utter paralysis of sheer fascination fettered my eyes upon the head of what had once been a white man before the Moro headhunters had decapitated him.

Alverez took it in his hands, gloating over it, flashed me a triumphant look and slowly immersed the head in the mixture he called "flame." Seen through the translucent, writhing liquid, it took on a still more sinister aspect; but nothing happened.

We sat and watched, in silence, for a disquieting hour, Alverez intent, muttering; I, fascinated at first, finally walked away to get a cigarette. Alverez followed. His nervousness was apparent and he hungered for the solace of nicotine fully as much as I did.

Then a peculiar impression that I was being observed obsessed me. We both whirled around at the same moment and stared, awe-struck. *The eyes of the head had opened!*

My heart thundered suddenly, and the flesh seemed to creep down my back. I stared, uncomprehendingly, and a shout came from Alverez.

"It's working!" he cried, and ran to the bowl.

I shambled over as if in a trance. Some prescience of violences unutterable, of horrors unspeakable, swelled my tongue and constricted my throat. The cigarette fell from my fingers, unheeded.

Entranced by some incomprehensible force, I watched the head in its turbulent bath, and to my excited, overstrung nerves it seemed that the eyelids flickered.

Alverez crouched in front of the glass bowl like a huge frog, intent, his lips moving. I stood rooted to the spot, unable to voice the agitation that threatened to overwhelm me.

And a remarkable thing happened—I swear it, Mr. Breckenridge! A contortion swept the face in the bowl, and the eyes —they seemed full of an evil intelligence—turned to Alverez. The lips trembled as if something audible was going to issue from them.

Panic possessed me. Alverez had discovered something epoch-making.

"It's working!" the sibilant whisper came from his lips. He motioned for me to come nearer. "Come here! Watch! The head will live—and it will tell us everything! Wa——"

I cried out in sheer fright as the eyes left Alverez and swung to meet mine. I saw *reason* in their depths, I tell you—and my flesh crawled and my skin prickled as the lips began to writhe and contort themselves in an apparent effort at expression.

It was uncanny. It defied every natural law—*but there it was!*

Alverez reached into the bowl with his metal forceps and raised the head until only the ragged neck was touching the solution. Here he perched it on a cross

member of glass he had rigged, and stepped back. The eyes glowed; the lips seemed to be making a Herculean effort to speak. Color flowed in the gaunt cheeks and I saw the throb of a vein in one temple.

Mute, hardly believing my eyes, I watched, too frightened to speak or move.

"Talk!" commanded Alverez, in a high, thin voice. "Talk, damn you! Who were you? What's your name? Can you hear me? Can you understand me?"

The face glowed redly, as with bursting blood; the lips snarled away from the yellow fangs of teeth—and by the gods! —a sound came from the mouth—not of vocal chords or lung pressure—but a chuckling so eery that my blood froze in my veins. And then, as Alverez, stunned, fell back a step, the head seemed to sway slightly as with some mighty effort.

A cold perspiration broke out over my body and it seemed to me that I could not breathe. Alverez was pale as chalk; but the zealot triumphed.

"It will live!" he shouted, like a maniac. "It lives, Phil! See? I can make it live—and I will make it talk! I'll take the vocal chords from another body—and make them function with this head! I can do it—I know I can!"

The head contorted its features convulsively, the eyes rolled from Alverez to me in an agony of inarticulate pleading, fear, pain—and something snapped in my brain like the bursting of a bomb. I picked up a chair and flung it, panic-stricken, at the head. Words poured from my lips:

"Alverez, you devil," I shouted, beside myself, "let me smash it——"

"Stop!" he cried, wildly. "For God's sake—don't!"

But a frenzy of fear possessed me. I picked up another chair and struck blindly, again and again. Suddenly, I saw Alverez on the floor, quiet, as if dead. The head lay in a corner and the "flame" bowl was broken. The liquid ran like a red stream of fire toward the head. I was conscious of one glance of unearthly hatred from those ghostly eyes, and then flame suddenly enveloped the room.

Maybe it was the cigarette; maybe not; but I remember nothing else until I awakened in the hospital.

And here I found that I was charged with the murder of my best friend. It's not true! I did not kill him. It is, of course, possible that I hit him with the chair in my unseeing frenzy, but if so, God knows it was unintentional. This is the truth, Mr. Breckenridge, and I wanted you to know it.

PHILIP KRUEGER.

THAT was the letter. I immediately called the jail and identified myself, stating that I wanted to talk to Krueger. The warden answered me.

"Krueger? Sorry, sir! He went completely haywire last night and passed out this morning. Yep! Dead! Well, I guess that ends his appeal to a higher court, eh?"

I hung up. "No," I told myself, "it doesn't. He has gone before a higher court!"

In Memoriam

HENRY ST. CLAIR WHITEHEAD

READERS of WEIRD TALES will be grieved to hear of the death of that distinguished author, the Reverend Henry S. Whitehead, Ph. D., who was a regular contributor to this magazine. His death was caused by a painful gastric illness of more than two years' duration.

Doctor Whitehead, descended paternally from an old Virginian family and maternally from a noted line of Scottish West Indian planters, was born in 1882 in Elizabeth, New Jersey. As a boy he attended the Berkeley School in New York City, and in 1904 was graduated from Harvard University, a classmate of President-elect Franklin D. Roosevelt. Studying under men like Santayana and Münsterberg, he later took his degree as Doctor of Philosophy. His first literary work was published in 1905, and from that time forward he was an increasingly well-known writer in many fields.

In 1912, having graduated from the Berkeley Divinity School, Doctor Whitehead was ordained a deacon of the Episcopal Church; and was advanced to the priesthood in 1913. From 1913 to 1917 he was rector of Christ Church in Middletown, Connecticut, and was later children's pastor at St. Mary the Virgin's in New York City. During 1919-23 he was senior assistant at the Church of the Advent in Boston, and in 1923-5 was rector of Trinity Church at Bridgeport, Connecticut. Subsequently Doctor Whitehead served as acting archdeacon in the Virgin Islands, where he had previously served several winters in a similar capacity.

As an author Doctor Whitehead specialized in fiction, though writing much on ecclesiastical and other subjects. Beginning in 1923, when his story, *The Intarsia Box* (in *Adventure*), received a first-class rating as a story of distinction from the O. Henry Memorial Committee, many similar honors were accorded his work. In 1927 he contributed to the *Free Lance Writers' Handbook* an article on the technique of weird fiction which is still a standard text on the subject.

It is for weird fiction of a subtle, realistic and quietly potent sort that he will be best remembered by readers of this magazine, in which twenty-five of his greatest tales have been published. Deeply versed in the somber folklore of the West Indies, and of the Virgin Islands in particular, he caught the inmost spirit of the native superstitions and wrote them into tales whose accurate local background created an astonishing illusion of genuineness. His "jumbee" stories—popularly so-called because of their frequent inclusion of a typical Virgin Island belief—form a permanent contribution to spectral literature, while his recurrent central character and narrator, "Gerald Canevin" (embodying much of his own personality), will always be recalled as a life-like and lovable figure.

Prominent among Doctor Whitehead's tales are *Sea Change, Jumbee, The Tree Man, Black Tancrede, Hill Drums,* and *Passing of a God*—the latter perhaps representing the peak of his creative genius.

THE EYRIE

A FLOOD of letters in praise or denunciation of interplanetary stories was called forth by our query in the January issue as to whether you want us to drop that type of story entirely from WEIRD TALES. We quote first from two letters which summarize the arguments against such stories:

A. B. Leonard, of Portsmouth, Ohio, writes to the Eyrie: "In your January number you ask the question, Do the readers like interplanetary stories? and make the comment that only a few readers have written complaints about this type of story. The rest of us are so enraged that we can't see straight enough to write to you. Interplanetary stories are *not* weird. They are merely thrillers. The same events could be at home in any of the adventure magazines merely by changing the locale. Take the present serial for instance: the yellow men of Venus are Chinamen, and the red juice they are constantly spitting is the betel-nut juice of the Orient. The toads are merely African savages, and the hairy men are Bolsheviks. The hero and heroine are the typical characters of adventure stories. And such people as these interplanetary authors depict! Bugs, crawdads, iron statues, square men, gaseous men, toads and what not. Oh, and the usual globular men. Why do all interplanetary stories *have* to have globular men? I have read countless of these stories and practically all of them have globular men in them. And returning to the other freaks we meet in these stories, I can just picture the author sitting at his desk scratching his head and muttering to himself, 'Now what kind of a queer duck can I use here?' And another thing, if one—if even one—of these stories ever had a different plot from the one laid down by Mr. Burroughs in his Mars books, I might be able to condone the fact that they are not weird tales. But no—every one is cut to the same pattern. The superman from the earth outfights, outruns, outjumps, outthinks, outloves every man on the new planet and tears in tooth and toenail and whips them all to a frazzle, grabs the most beautiful girl of the most advanced kingdom, becomes king and conquers the entire planet, and introduces universal peace. And another thing. If the heroine is as beautiful as the stories say she is, why get mad at the villain for wanting her?"

A letter from Howard Charlton, of Berkeley, California, says: "Since you put the question to WEIRD TALES readers, whether you should publish interplanetary stories, allow me, as a confirmed WT hound, to utter a loud and hearty NO. These stories are not weird. The reason is, that since the setting is purely imaginary, the wildest flights of fancy have no normalcy to contrast with, in the story. On Mars or Venus anything can happen—all hell can pop without causing one to bat an eye.

If you get few kicks about this, it is because the stories themselves are good of their kind, and it seems unkind to object to a writer doing good work. But these tales are not—*quod ante dixeramus*—weird, and have no place in a magazine the purpose of which is to curdle the blood, raise the hair, and make one heartily hope that such things ain't! Also let me register an objection, though I suppose I shall be in a still smaller minority, against 'weird-scientific' tales. Weirdness appeals to the emotions more than to the reasoning powers, and the cold light of science, or even pseudo-science, calls too much reason into play to give the weird feeling a chance to develop. Seabury Quinn knows his stuff in this respect—he introduces very convincing, because actual, bits of science, especially medicine, as contrast to the weirdness, not as weird material *per se*. This is the way pure science should be used in fiction. If you must have weird-scientific tales, cut them short. The reader should be knocked breathless by the astounding idea, not given time to realize that it is really impossible, which he will in a long tale of this kind. No amount of detail (as in *The Monsters)* can keep up the illusion. Also the human element is almost ignored by these authors. In weird fiction it should be stressed. We can only appreciate the horror of people we seem to know, like Jules de Grandin in Quinn's fine tales."

Clifton Amsbury, of Lincoln, Nebraska, who signs himself Secretary of the International Scientific Association, writes to the Eyrie: "The common run of interplanetary stories is getting overdone, but so far I have not seen any of the common run in WEIRD. Such stories as Kline's Venus tales can no more be called merely 'interplanetary' than Howard's tales about Conan can be called 'historic.' There was an element of the occult in the way Grandon got to Venus, but that is gone now and the only claim to weirdness is in the monsters and strange races. The point may be stretched but a little variety is good. And as to the crack about being suitable for adolescents, aren't a good many of your readers adolescents? I was when I first started reading WEIRD TALES."

"I have been a reader of WEIRD TALES ever since the first copy," writes William Moore, of Waverly, New York, "and I have not missed one since that. I have not written to the Eyrie before, but when I see all the criticism about Otis Adelbert Kline I can't keep still any longer. I think we should have interplanetary stories by all means. I think Kline is one of the best writers you have, though I have never found a poor story in your magazine yet."

A letter from W. H. Pope, of Bradford, Arkansas, says: "If it isn't too late to get in on this controversy, I'd like to register an emphatic vote in favor of the continuance of WEIRD TALES' policy regarding interplanetary yarns. Hamilton is O. K., and as for Kline's current serial, well, *Buccaneers of Venus* would separate me from a quarter any time. Let WEIRD TALES alone! A steady diet of supernatural stuff would pall, and the interplanetary stories and weird-scientific dope balance the magazine perfectly, adding the necessary zest. By all means keep 'em."

Katherine Turner writes from Laguna in the Philippine Islands: "I am a bit late in telling you which stories I like best in your September WEIRD TALES, but as I live far away, the numbers are slow getting to me. I was delighted with *The Sheraton Mirror* by August W. Derleth, a delicately written and unusually interesting piece of imaginative writing. Also, as usual, Clark Ashton Smith's story, *The Em-*

pire of the Necromancers, deserves special credit. Mr. Smith's stories, always written with the hand of an artist, are a continued source of pleasure. I would not hesitate to name him your best writer."

"In your January issue," writes Claude H. Cameron, of Toronto, Canada, "I vote first place to Seabury Quinn for *A Gamble in Souls.* Quinn is getting better and better. I am glad to see him use the plot he did; I half suspect that Mr. Quinn is a member of a certain mystic order and that his plots are taken from facts that he can not definitely put forth. I understand that Mr. Quinn knows much about the art of embalming. Why not a story based on a soul returning to its body as the mortician is about to begin work? If Mr. Quinn really knows as much as I think, he can hatch out a good story somewhat along the lines of Marie Corelli's *Ardath.*"

Henry Hasse, of Indianapolis, laments in a letter to the Eyrie: "Why, oh, why did you do it? Discontinue 'The Unique Magazine' on the cover, I mean. From any angle I look at it, I can not see how it was a change for the better. Please put it back. A foolish request, you may think. But—one of my most valued collections is a set of WEIRD TALES, almost complete, back to the first number, March, 1923. And as I look through them, and see The Unique Magazine on every cover, I have become proud of that trademark; it exemplifies the literary quality of WEIRD TALES, puts it into a class in which it reigns alone. Why, those three words *belong* to the magazine; I am almost angry; you had no right to take them from the cover."

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue? The most popular story in our January number, as shown by your votes and letters to the Eyrie, was that utterly strange story by Robert E. Howard entitled *The Scarlet Citadel.* This received more than twice as many votes as its nearest competitor. Your second choice was the third installment of Otis Kline's interplanetary serial, *Buccaneers of Venus.*

My favorite stories in the March WEIRD TALES are:

Story	Remarks
(1)----------	----------
(2)----------	----------
(3)----------	----------

I do not like the following stories:

(1)----------	Why?----------
(2)----------	----------

It will help us to know what kind of stories you want in Weird Tales if you will fill out this coupon and mail it to The Eyrie, Weird Tales, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Reader's name and address:

Coming Next Month

I OPENED my eyes, and saw that I was in a vast, high-ceiled room pervaded with a phosphorescent greenness that quivered and glowed and flickered maddeningly. I was lying near the wall. My hands and feet were tied with cords. My clothing still reeked from the foulness of that which had brought me here, although the stench was rapidly becoming less intense. I shivered from the memory of that repugnant contact.

In the dim light of the room, I could distinguish hooded and robed figures. Some sat cross-legged, each on a bench scarcely larger than a coffee-table. Others, shadowy, ominous presences, conferred in low tones. A heavy haze of incense from several wrought-iron tripods clouded the room with its dizzying, breath-taking fumes. From another apartment, beyond the brocaded draperies, that concealed a doorway, I could hear the muttering of kettle-drums, and the whine of single-stringed *kemenjahs,* and the sobbing notes of pipes. The weird, minor harmony sent chills up my spine.

Then a man garbed in formal evening attire emerged from the shadows. He was tall and aquiline-featured; his eyes were glittering and phosphorescent, like those of a great cat.

This was the Master of the show, who had defiled the very order of life in his attempt to gratify his ghastly whim; and those robed, hooded figures that moved through the spectral haze of the room were his acolytes, and his adepts in the devilish hierarchy which he had assembled.

One of the adepts strode across the tile floor and halted within a few paces of the Master. . . .

You can not afford to miss this thrill-tale of modern sorcery, of murder and fighting and sudden death, and the return of the ancient Queen of Sheba from the shadows, by the author of *The Stranger from Kurdistan.* It will be printed complete in the April WEIRD TALES:

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GOLDEN BLOOD

By JACK WILLIAMSON

A fascinating novel of weird adventures in the hidden land beyond the cruel Arabian desert of the Rub' Al Khali, and a golden folk that ride upon a golden-yellow tiger and worship a golden snake.

TIGER DUST

By BASSETT MORGAN

Another thrilling tale of brain-transplantation, and the eery vengeance of a weird tiger, by the author of *The Devils of Po Sung.*

REVELATIONS IN BLACK

By CARL JACOBI

An utterly strange story of three mad volumes and a weird woman who sat by a fountain in the house of the twenty-six bluejays.

April WEIRD TALES Out March 1

A Witch Passes

By M. C. BODKIN

Shrive me, father,
Shrive my soul
Ere I am laid
In the deep black hole.

Curuck, curoo, curuck, curoo
How high we flew, how fast we flew
Over the steeple, over the roof,
Fair young witch and cloven hoof,
Snout and claw and shaggy hide,
Faggots are horses when witches ride
Down the wind in screaming flight—
But who will be his bride tonight?
Ave, Sathanas, ora pro nobis!

Light three tapers
At my head,
Give me the oil
And the holy bread.

Curuck, curoo, curuck, curoo
The bog fires glimmered green and blue
While we greased the pot with gallows' sweat
Wiped from the thing a-dangling yet
Dead on the creaking gibbets' shank—
The dark brew bubbled and boiled and sank
Spattering warm blood left and right—
But who will be his bride tonight?
Ave, Sathanas, ora pro nobis!

Give me the cross
That I may kiss
The one who died
To give me bliss.

Curuck, curoo, curuck, curoo
Thrice the sable cockerel crew;
Chant your masses, demon choir,
Prepare the couch and the crown of fire!
Shriek, O fiends and devils, shout,
Turn the holy cross about!
Sharper his kiss than Death's own bite
Though I shall be his bride tonight!
Ave, Sathanas, ora pro nobis.

The Look

By MAURICE LEVEL

The dark shadow of a dead man came between the doctor and his wife—a new story by the author of "Cruel Tales"

THE log fire was dying in the grate. About the whole room, lighted by a too heavily shaded lamp, there was something vaguely menacing that chilled my blood the moment I entered it.

My friend came forward. "I am glad to see you, very glad," he said, holding out his hand.

He had aged and altered so that I should hardly have recognized him. Extending his hand in the direction of the fireplace, he said in a low voice, "My friend Janville . . . my wife."

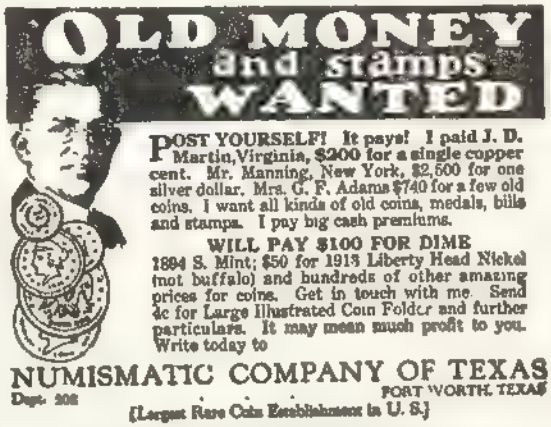
I discerned a very pale face and a slender form that bowed slightly, while a subdued voice, a melancholy, weary voice, murmured, "We are pleased to see you here, *Monsieur.*"

My friend offered me a chair. The white form relapsed into immobility; and silence, a deadened silence through which flitted indefinable thoughts, fell upon us.

I could think of nothing to say. These two had been man and wife for some months. They had been in love for years before they were free to marry. And this was how I found them now!

My friend broke the silence with a hesitating inquiry as to my health, and his thought seemed far from the words that fell from his lips.

"Fine," I replied, and speaking lower, I added, "You are happy?"



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"Yes," he muttered.

His wife coughed slightly, and rose.

"Forgive me, *Monsieur,* but I am a little tired. You will excuse me, I am sure. . . . Please do not go."

She crossed the dining-room, presented her forehead to her husband, and left us.

My friend got up and paced the floor with long strides, gnawing his mustache, then, stopping abruptly before me, put his hand on my shoulder.

"I said I was happy. That's a lie!"

I looked at him in mute astonishment.

"No doubt you think I am out of my mind," he continued. "Not yet, but I'm likely to be before long. . . . Don't you feel some sinister influence brooding over this house?"

"Your wife and you appear to be under some cloud, certainly. Some worry, no doubt, the importance of which you exaggerate."

"No! No! No! There's a horror hanging to these walls . . . there's a terror creeping about these floors. Between my wife and me there's the shadow of Crime . . . of Crime!

"As you know, she who today is my wife was for long months my mistress. You know how desperately I loved her . . . or rather you do *not* know . . . no one *can* know. . . . I worshipped her, that creature, worshipped her to the point of devotion . . . of frenzy. From the day she came into my life, there was no other life for me. She became a need in my nature, a flaw in my sanity, a vice in my blood.

"I thought of running away with her, of challenging the voice of scandal. But neither of us had any means. I had only my profession to support me. And our being together openly in Paris was not to be thought of . . . so I put aside honor, every moral scruple. To see her more frequently, I obtained an introduction to the husband. I cultivated his acquaintance. I came to be his constant guest, his intimate friend.

"I made that despicable third in a household who, under the shelter of its welcome, steals in cold blood from its master his peace and happiness.

"I spent my holidays with them. He was a great sportsman; while he was out in the woods and fields I passed my time with her.

"ONE day we two were startled by loud cries. I ran downstairs, and found the terrified servants gathered around the husband.

"Stretched upon a couch, he was fighting for breath with quick, short gasps, as he clutched at a wound in his abdomen.

" 'Ah, *Monsieur,*' faltered the man who carried his game-bag, 'how suddenly it happened! *Monsieur* had just shot a woodcock . . . it fell in the rushes, he ran toward the spot, and all in a moment, I don't know how it happened, but I heard a report—a cry—and I saw *Monsieur* fall forward. . . . I brought him here.'

"I cut away the clothes and examined his injuries. The charge had plowed through his side. Blood flowed in jets from a terrible wound extending from above the hip to the thigh.

"Years of training made me regard him solely as a patient. I examined him as if it had been a hospital case. I even gave a sigh of satisfaction as I learned that his injuries were really superficial. The intestines did not appear to be involved, but on the wound's internal surface a small artery was spurting freely.

"Hearing footsteps, I looked up, and saw Her standing in the doorway. A strange and unaccountable agony gripped

my heart. It was with a great effort that I said, 'Don't come here. . . . Go away.'

" 'No,' she said, and drew nearer.

"I could not take my eyes from hers—she had fascinated them. My finger still pressing upon the artery, the sufferer full in her view, I watched that look of hers as a man watches a dagger pointed at his throat, a wavering dagger, the gleam of which hypnotizes him.

She drew still nearer, and a cloudy impotence fell upon my will. That look spoke things of terrible import. It seized upon my soul, that look; it spoke—no need of words to make me understand what it asked of me. It said:

" 'You can have me for your own. . . . You can take me and keep me. . . . I shall thrill to no other joy, faint under no other fondness . . . if only you will——'

"Once more I faltered: 'You must not stay here. . . . Go away.'

"But the look spoke again:

" 'Soul without resolution . . . heart that dares not . . . what have you always longed for? . . . Look! . . . Chance changes your dream to reality.'

"The artery pulsed under my finger and, little by little, strive as I would to maintain it, the pressure diminished.

"She was close to me. She bent above me. Her breath played in my hair; the emanation from her body stole into every fiber of my being, impregnated my hands, my lips—that exhalation of love which was madness to me.

"All conception of time, of danger, of duty, fled from my mind.

"Suddenly the door opened, and a servant appeared with my surgical case. The stupor was dispelled.

" 'Quick! Give it to me!' I shouted rather than called.

"But then . . . I saw that my finger had

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deserted its post . . . that there was now no pulsation under it . . . that the stricken man's lip was drawn upward into the mocking semblance of a smile . . . and . . . that it was all over.

"Our eyes met. And in that moment a shadow fell between us, a shadow with a mocking smile—the shadow of the dead man. . . .

"I THOUGHT at first that this nightmare would fade away. I strove to assure myself that the fatal issue was an accident, unavoidable. But since she became my wife, that shadow is between us, always, everywhere. Neither speaks of it, but it comes between our meeting eyes.

"I—I see once more her eyes, the look, saying, 'Take me. Let us be free.' She—she sees once more my hand, as, by slow degrees, it lets the life of her husband ebb away. And hatred has come, a silent hatred, the hatred of two murderers who are in the bonds of a mutual fear.

"We remain for hours as you have seen us tonight. Words rush up within us, smite asunder the clenched teeth, half open the lips—and we keep silence."

He took a dagger from the table, tried the edge with his finger.

"Cowards . . . both of us!"

He flung the weapon, clanging, to the table, and burying his face in his hands, burst into tears.

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